PART ONE

"MY TOUR OF DUTY" 1952-1954

Basic Training

It was the required responsibility, that of being a young male and living within the continental limits of the United States, to furnish your name and your whereabouts, these pertinent facts made up a roster of available persons qualified as top-of-the-line by their peers…and to be selective candidates for military service should the need arise. It was called the Local Draft Board. Mine was in Chamberlain, South Dakota.

To begin this account, let us go back to late May of 1951. Having recently been released from the Pierre National Guard with already some pre-Basic Training experience, and a two-week bivouac exercise at a military facility in Minnesota, Ft. Ripley (between Little Falls and Brainerd). I served with the Pierre National Guard unit, Capt. Boocock, the Company Commander for a period of nearly two years. This was credited military time I was informed when I was drafted into regular duty. Reporting to Sioux Falls for physical and oath of allegiance, called being sworn in, it was April 2, 1952.

The people from Lyman County: Mike Sweeney-Presho, Wayne Hall-Vivian, and myself Mel Dittman-Presho. A Native American Alonzo Busch, I believe from Mission, South Dakota, passed our testing and physicals and were now Army property on a train headed for a quartermaster depot for clothing issue and all the things we'd need for Basic Training including a rifle, mess kit, backpack and a little shovel to dig fox holes with, plus other aptly suited details, like latrine duty when camping out—the Army called it "on bivouac." A temporary outdoor encampment, usually with tents as shelter (per Webster) with all this unfamiliar gear to take care of, we all looked at each other laughing and jesting as our duffel bags were packed to the max space available, and approached a 60 lb. weight. Yes, the first test of just what kind of physical shape do you represent?

We, a mass of Recruits from Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and other mid-west states lugged their gear aboard a new later model train and in the dark of night, we listened to the clickity-clack of iron wheels on rail splices, each of us in our own thoughts as we realized a new and different adventure was just beginning for all those who now were known by a series of letters and numbers. This new I.D. was called a "dog tag." I still remember mine: U.S. 55267211.

We slept and dozed in the coach cars as well as anyone can…when you're tired enough, sleep comes easy. Sunrise revealed we were in Louisville, Kentucky. What if they'll let us view the gold at Fort Knox? I don't think so. But, I'll bet those guarding the gold will be viewing us, 'cause that's our destination. By truck, G.I. 6-bys with wood hoop canvas covered bed, a fold-up bench on each side of the box.

The trucks each stopped at the main gate to Ft. Knox (the distance from the Louisville train depot, between 20-25 miles). Fort Knox is a big area. No telling where the gold was. The Cadre, a Cpl. in fresh pressed fatigues came to the rear of our truck. Yes, we had arrived. The two-striper announced, "Get your minds off the gold and listen up. You are at your Basic Training Command…these three two-story barracks buildings will be your home for the next three months." A pause. "Dismount from the

truck, fall in, a column of ducks!" What he's talkin' about, my National Guard experience helped to understand the military lingo. The Cpl., after much personal adjusting of the Recruits as to the direction and distance relative to each other, finally said loudly, "Lunch will be your pleasure. You will enjoy it! Attench-hut! Right face! Forward march! Then he double-timed to be the lead soldier just off the left of the marching column. Not all in step, but we ended up outside the Company mess hall. A great beginning! We do have potential, plus a place to call home. How many months did he say?? A thought: Hey! You better listen closer when the info is presented. You got that right buddy!

When the training command was organized, the barracks were assigned alphabetically: 1st Platoon A's thru F, 2nd Platoon G's thru N, 3rd Platoon O thru Z, which placed about seventy Recruits in each barracks. The barrack's Cadre had a private room in each of the barracks, his building to "ride herd on," plus its inmates; the Recruits, us, we'ans. Yes, all of us.

Fellow Basic trainees. Only two recognized. L-R: Unknown, Dallas Gordon, unknown, unknown, on far right: myself, Mel Dittman.

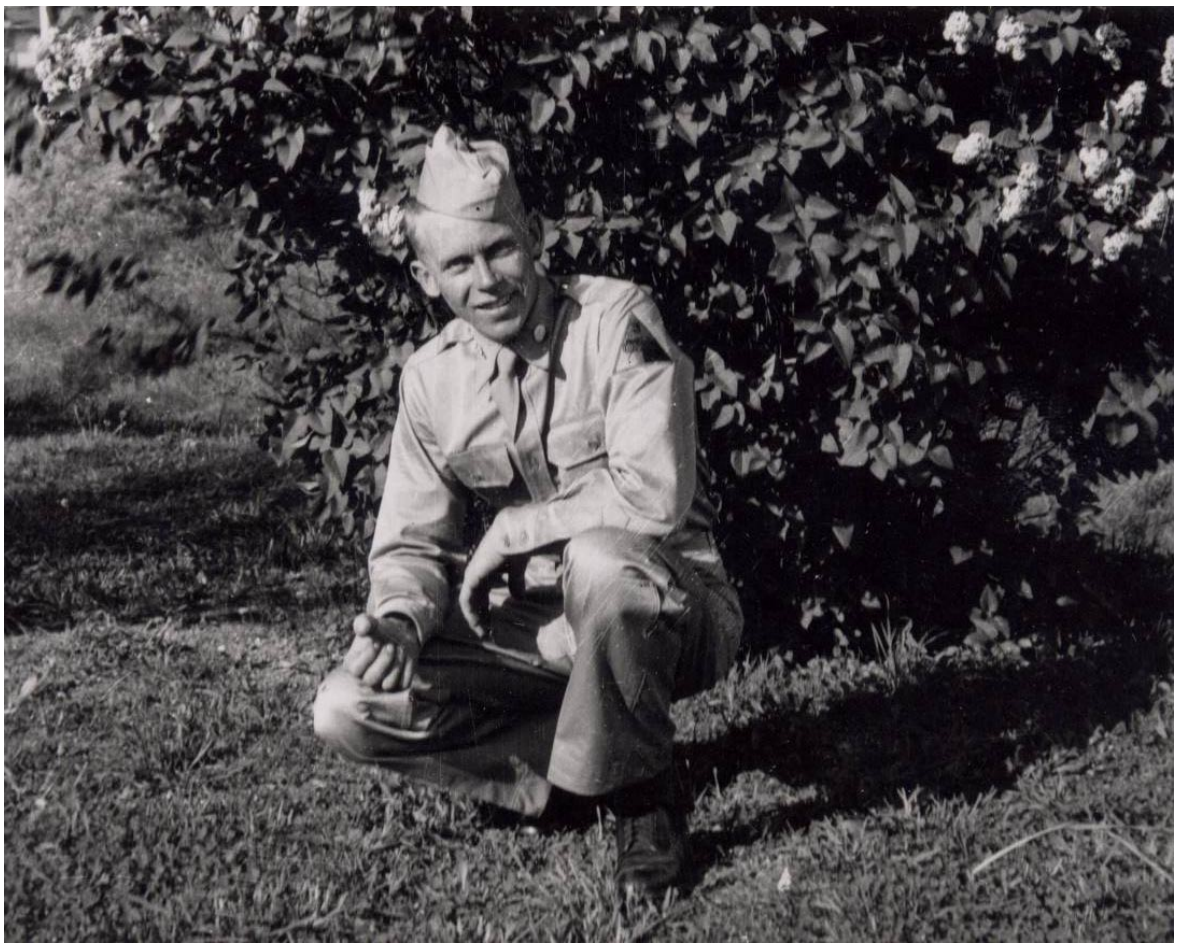
The early rising was not a positive event. Sarge sez, "Well, if you need more sleep, go to bed earlier. And let me say this: Don't try to sleep in the classes you'll be attending." Some did nod off occasionally, only to be applauded by the entire class when alertness was apparent again.

Close order drill is practiced until you don't meet anyone face-to-face while doing it. It's a form of discipline for the soldier, a sense of teamwork and a confidence builder, a strong sense of belonging and

performing. Be crisp. Look sharp. Be a soldier, a proud American soldier when you're through with your Basic Training, ready to serve.

The weather for being in armor (tanks) was not easy to tolerate for many. The inside of a tank on the summer sun beating down on it would nearly bake biscuits on the floor of the turret. We spent a lot of school hours in drivers training, gunners training, and had to know how all the weapons functioned, and gain experience firing all of these lethal pieces of defense or offense…depends on whether you're position is forward or holding, as to your mission and orders, or predicament, which is always the resultant of combat. The Cadre stressed this ever-changing condition.

By the third week of Basic Training, I was becoming better acquainted with a young man from Hitchcock, South Dakota. Dallas Gordon, who had been working in Pierre for a contractor during a portion of 1951, when we had previously shared some stories and favorite tales and exploits of recent high school days. Our friendship was to last to this very time frame, albeit with huge break in the middle, yes, a time span of fifty-one years as it has become reality. Having a friend in Presho, Joe Coble, rev up his computer while we brothers Delbert, Curtis, and grandson Aaron, were enjoying a week of bird hunting in the Presho vicinity last fall, 2003. Joe called me and told me my sought after Army buddy now lived in Sun City West, Arizona. Complete with address and phone number. What a break for me to meet up with Mr. Joe Coble (more to follow later).



Summer kaki dress uniform. Going off-post to Louisville, dance with the debutantes of Kentucky. Summer of 1952.

Some of us would go to Louisville on the weekends…if we could get a day pass. Sometimes schedules demanded Saturday to be spent at firing ranges, or night problems, and of all nights…Saturday nights. Dern-dern. Louisville had a very nice servicemen's canteen, live music on the weekend (Friday-Saturday) and some very nice female representatives of Kentucky's southern hospitality and social set. We always had a good time. Gave us something to think about while trying to get better at in sequence calisthenics or close order drill on the grinder. Thinking about the evenings with the debutants of Louisville did not enhance mistake free performance of disciplined physical drills.

Money was always in short supply. If I recall, fresh Recruits earned (and I mean "really earned") in the neighborhood of $75.00 per month. If you were mad at the world and wanted to stay in the barracks and spit shine your shoes and polish your brass and belt buckles, you could save money. If you drank beer and smoked, well then, it was a matter of how much. But, that's not staying in the barracks. For the most part, you'd be all alone, or maybe another poor soul trying to get over a Dear John letter.

I spent my monthly pay. I smoked some, not a pack-a-day puffer, but a smoke seemed okay while nursing a bottle of beer and playing conversational badminton, called "can you top this?" However, I managed to continue at least on the poverty level to go on with flight instruction, which I had just begun while my brother Delbert and I were working in Myrtle Point, Oregon the summer and fall of 1951.

I would take a bus from the main gate to a little pasture, pea patch, country airport just alongside the highway to Louisville about half the distance to town, a bus stop luckily for my intent was at the road leading to the little field, grass runway (one), about 2,000 feet of it with low trees off the ends. Plenty of rolling room for a light aircraft, the likes of which was a Piper J-3. Yellow of course. But, oh yes! …and with a black lightning bolt horizontally painted centered so it looked just as neat and proper as it was 'sposed to. I was enchanted by this heavier than air machine. And when my 200 lb. instructor got in behind me to teach me how to drive this great invention, with my 170 lbs. we were (if the gas tank was full) near the max allowable gross weight. But the good fresh low-time Continental up front was up to the chores. Kinda like the little train that could, and puffing and struggling, finally then "knew" it could as we cleared the trees by forty feet with no headwind. I'd had about four hours in a C-140 while in Oregon at the coastal town of Coos Bay. This was my first meeting with a yoke control aircraft, the J-3 we were using now, climbing to 600 ft. AGL on a 45° heading, we exit the pattern. The J-3 is actuated configuration, as were most of the early airplanes.

I tried to manage my dollars so I could fly at least two hours a month. The plane, fuel, and instructor during the summer of this 1952 date, cost about $12.00 an hour. The instructor took $5.00 of the total. The economy was in recession and work not easy to come by. The instructor was a pilot in WWII. I cannot remember his name. This endeavor also gave me something to think about in addition to all the new adventures of studying to be a soldier, plus the dancing girls in Louisville. I'm not homesick, but only thinking frequently of my family north of Presho.

Brother Deb, in early December, returned to his job in Oregon. Both of us enjoyed the Thanksgiving holiday at home with family. I had requested transfer of my draft call while in Oregon back to Chamberlain, South Dakota. The request was granted. The paperwork for this transfer took about four months. I spent Christmas and New Year's with family also. It was now 1952, and a winter of record was in the making: extremes of wind and snow which are two ingredients for a plain's blizzard change of scene to hazardous travel and moving feed to stock. Or conversely, moving the stock to the feed was almost a toss up. Difficult to say the least, impossible it seemed in some areas of the state, the ranching communities were in dire need of help.

My dad, Ward Dittman, purchased a one-of-a-kind snowplane, a pusher propeller driven mode of transportation, having an aircraft radial engine mounted aft of the passenger cabin, which would seat six plus the single seat for the operator-pilot for a comfort zone of seven. This machine was a new concept for our part of South Dakota. Dad used it for many chores, but primarily its mission was to get mom back and forth to the country school she taught at (Dolly's) near thirteen miles south of our place.

The great gift of the waiting for a date to signal reporting for induction was just that, a time to experience and sample this new hybrid that made lots of noise as the three-blade prop moved it over the top of the accumulated snowdrifts of the winter scene. Truly an adventure, uncommon in privilege and good fortune!

Back to Basic Training again. We had a longer than average schedule to complete because of the complexity of being in armor. Lots to absorb in the upper story when dealing with a track-laying motorized vehicle that is essentially an artillery piece, along with a top-of-the-turret mounted .50 cal machine gun plus two .30 cal machine guns, one mounted co-axial with the big gun, the other manned by the front-slope bow gunner. This machine is rife with hi-tech gadgetry and operational demands and procedures, and all must be learned as well as experienced in outdoor field and range locations. All Recruits must have this opportunity to see, feel, touch, manipulate, and operate not only the tank as a vehicle, but everything on it, about it, from engine, transmission, final drives, bogie-wheels, tracks, escape hatches, outside telephone, inside radio stack, ammo and storage wells, to small arms locations inside the turret. How to load the big 75mm cannon and get out of the way of its recoil path when it is fired, how to operate the deflection and range elevations both manually and with auxiliary electric power in conjunction with the telescope sight used to aim the big gun. The floor trigger used only when in manual turret as opposed to the pistol grip with firing trigger for the auxiliary-electric method for turret movement. The telescope had a range finder built into its construction. This took some attentive visual interpretations to read it right. Yes, this war machine was a bundle of demands handled by five hopefully capable learned soldiers, well trained by veteran Cadre who had been there (combat) and done that (combat).

I was appointed "squad leader" for a given bunk station on the second story of 1st Platoon's barracks. It was my mission to assist the Cadre (Sgt.) of this training segment to make better of them, also to give help in clarifying some of the technical information regarding the tanks operational details and the gunnery technicalities. I was learning probably more than the personnel in my squad (about ten Basic trainees). If I was doubtful of the answers, I'd go with the one asking the questions and knock on the door of the residing barracks Sgt.

Several weeks went by. We now had familiarization and range firing under our helmets (knew all there was to know) about an M-1 .30 cal semi-automatic Garand rifle, also the same for the M-1 semi-automatic .30 cal carbine (one of these was part of the small arms in each tank). Also in this group of weapons, was the light .30 air-cooled light machine gun, two in each tank, one in the turret fired only by the gunner, and co-axially fixed to shoot by the telescope sight, as was used by the big gun. The second .30 cal light air-cooled machine gun was mounted forward of the assistant driver, or bow gunner's position. We called this soldier the passenger. If it were necessary to ever abandon the tank to be on foot, crewmen would take an additional weapon with themselves for the tanker's personal firearm, a .45 cal 1911 semi-automatic nine-shot pistol. A pistol needless to say, would be scary to try to defend one's self if being overrun. But, a .30 cal light machine gun might give some creditable accounting of its capabilities, but only in the hands of well-trained soldiers. We joked about the .45 pistol's merit, when all its ammo had been spent it was just a tad better than a rock. Why? Because it was already in your hand!

On static display: A med. Tank. Turret gun is 7 5 mm. The location is Ft. Knox, Kentucky. July 1 9 5 2.

Time fleeted into yesterdays. We were ending our Basic Training, our twenty-six mile forced march and bivouac days where looming as the next challenge, the days were getting noticeably shorter, September was evident as leaves began to turn. The nights were cooling and everyone had by this time found out just what was expected of them. You become a team player. This concept, though demanding, is more pleasant. Each person by this time has come to know what it takes to best survive in a hostile environment; but as the Cadre kept mentioning, "Combat survival is the reward of serious training." Amen. That fact is ultimately the gift of graduation.

Beside the Training Company sign. Will march in a post parade. Late summer Ft. Knox, KY. 1 9 5 2.

Training days ended with a big parade on the parade grounds of Fort Knox. The Base Commander came to inspect what was earlier a rag-tag floundering plodding gaggle of Recruits. Now, the picture was quite different from the viewing platform as Col. McKay B. Greeley, Commanding Officer of Combat Team A and Lt. Col. Richard Gillis extended congratulations and best of soldiering speeches as we stood in our ranks at parade rest, then passed in review by the speech platform with 1st Lt. Robert C. Hodges, our Company A, Basic Training Commander. We had completed the schedule. We now would await orders of reassignment. Many of us stayed at Fort Knox to continue in special schools. I was selected to go to a NCO Leadership School, which lasted for six weeks. Dallas Gordon was selected to special advanced training in communications and radio operator and technician. Yes, tanks do have radios in them, usually two, and each on a different frequency. You might want to talk to the flyboys on special occasions.

The barracks of our recent training command were empty. The month of October was past the mid-mark, and those few of us remaining had moved (by request) into the mess hall. Perhaps there were a dozen of us bunked out there, including the three cooks and mess sergeant.

I received my orders around the 30th of October. I was to fly to Seattle, Washington and be on the base (Ft. Lawton) no later than the 18th of December. I was not to leave Ft. Knox until December 1st, which gave me almost two weeks for the journey. I'd have time to furlough with my family in Lyman County of South Dakota.

I spent my free time out at the little airport where I'd started flying. I now had near eight hours in the J-3 Cub and my instructor fortunately for me, was still there. Well, most of the time. I recall an incident that occurred during a one-hour lesson timeframe…a few hours back.

We were shooting touch and go landings and it was proper procedure to clear the engine after it (the engine) had been at low rpm settings as the plane descended to be at proper approach height for turning onto final leg of the pattern. This clearing was to increase the rpm to negate any fouling of the spark plugs, which would in turn diminish the engine's power if you had to make a go-around. So, on base leg we were. I was just ready to clear the engine when he said, "You'd better give it some power!" I responded with quick obedience, or more like quick jab of the throttle. The engine backfired before it accelerated, which startled me. But not as surprised as I was when he hit me on the head with his rolled up "Smilin' Jack" comic book, followed by a loud reminder to never ever use the throttle in that manner again. It had no accelerator pump to get gas into the intake manifold to support the need. Thusly, it backfired. He said it might have quit altogether. Then what?? I pondered the thought as my head was still sending a signal of abuse.

We landed with a small nudge and rolled up runway to the taxi exit, then rolled to a stop at the tie-down spot. I raised the right side window and unlatched the fold-down door, typical of J-3 PA-11 and Super Cub models by Piper.

I stood back a bit as my mentor calmly unfolded and stood bent beneath the right wing. He remarked better get this yellow bird tied down afore the wind blows it away. I did so. As he watched, he said as I walked around the front of the craft, "Position the prop in the vertical. The birds can't roost on it that way." He paused, then smiling said, "You learned a bit more today. Next time you show up, I'll ride a couple times around. If you impress me, I'll solo you. Think about all we've done and also some things that were not quite right." The anticipation of next time made me glow inside.

I never did get to that next time. But I rehearsed for it continually for nearly three years. Two weeks later I was scheduled to fly via Minneapolis then to Pierre, South Dakota. I was getting ready to ride the Army bus into Louisville. We still were bunked in the mess hall, but used toilet and showers in the

barracks, which were finished and sparkling, having been repainted and totally repaired and really looked like they could tolerate a new Basic Training group.

I had laid out my dress uniform on my bunk with all my personal belongings, and I had worn the bare necessities and towel wrap to shower and shave in the spic and span reworked barracks. I thought about my missed solo chance, then dismissed it with the thought you'll have lots of time for flying after you finish your tour of duty. I splashed on some Old Spice and toweled it back twenty yards to the temporary mess hall quarters. I dressed and found that I was an hour ahead of the bus to the airport. I checked my duffel bag and everything I had, which would go with me. I checked my billfold, which I had put under the pillow on my bunk when I went to the shower. I opened it. My heart sank. Instead of the $202.00 I'd received for travel allowance, I viewed the pittance of $2.00. Two one-dollar bills remained. Some real sleaze of a so-called person had stolen the $200, bit out of sorrow had left the two dollars. What in the name of "flamin' inferno" can I do? I sat on my bunk trying to keep from grabbing the first person I laid eyes on. Who in this world would do a thing like steal a soldier's travel money? I knew of no suspects, but I had my suspicions that the thief was someone who bunked in the mess hall.

I wouldn't have a chance to detective this ill-fated situation. I had a dime and some loose change. I had Dallas Gordon's phone number. He was still on base, but bunked at his school's dormitory.

The phone rang about ten times. Then a voice, "U.S. Army. Who'd you want?" I quickly burst into vocal utterance. "Is there a Dallas Dode Gordon in your acquaintance?" A definite pause. "Yup. I think he's still here." I hear the shout, "Hey Gordon! Phone!"

"This is Dode Gordon." A familiar voice filled my ear canal. "Hey Dode," I blurted. "Hey, extreme good buddy and all the other good things you are, I've got a helluva problem. I'm supposed to catch a flight in Louisville, and some s.o.b. stole my travel advance while I was taking a shower. I'm desperate for cash. Do you have $200 I can borrow?" (God, I hated this predicament).

A three-second pause, then, "When do you have to go?" I answered, "Catch bus at gate in 45 minutes." The response, "I'll be right down." Ten minutes later, Dode Gordon handed me $200 in twenties and said, "I know I'll get it back. We'll take you to the main gate." The Fraser automobile driven by Will Bruette stopped and I stood joyfully humble and gave thanks as they drove back inside the Ft. Knox complex.

My bus stopped. I boarded it, entered the airport terminal and found my flight, a Lockheed 4-engine turbo prop destined for Minneapolis. Two hours and scant minutes, the intercom announced we were descending for landing, five minutes late due to headwinds. I had a half-hour to find my plane change, Western to Pierre. I found the right boarding aisle and soon was warming the seat over the wing area in a DC-3 twin engine. Soon, the tail was up and the steady harmonic pulse of the radials soothed me to nap time. The stewardess woke me with, "Buckle your seatbelt young soldier." She was quite pretty. What could I do? I sat belted in watching familiar lights as we banked and turned to align with the active runway at my alma mater (Pierre Senior High. 1948).

The weather was of Dakota style. A raw northwest breeze verified that fall was a season that had already spent its pleasant days for the pheasant hunters. Now it was deer season and a different breed of hunters stalked the hills and river bottoms in South Dakota.

After milling a bit in the small airport terminal, I recognized a political Senator James Abnor, representing the area of South Dakota, Lyman County. I think his home address was Kennebec. I approached him and received a hearty smile and a firm handshake. We had a brief exchange and he asked me where I intended to go. I responded that, "If I could get to Presho, it would be easy to get home." He said, "Ride with me. I have my car here at the airport." My lucky day, at least this part. I threw my duffel bag in the trunk of the Chevrolet and we became better acquainted as we rolled down

Highway 83 to Vivian, then into Presho. I thanked him. He wished me a safe journey to Korea…and return.

I called the farm: a long and a short (our country phone party line). Mom answered and her first question, "Where you at?" I said, "Presho." She said, "Stop kidding. You are not!" I said, "I'll start walking, it's dark already, we'll be right in…stay in Presho Café." In a short half-hour, we were a grinning and hugging those who were still at home, Mom, Dad, sister Linda, and last brother Curt. Bev (first sister) was boarding in Presho for high school, I think at George Gloe's residence. We left and traveled the familiar North Country main road to our Dittman farm and ranching operation. The same raw cold wind was from the northwest, same as it was several hours ago upon arrival in Pierre. I had nearly two weeks to spend at home. Then, it was westward ho, climb aboard a different aluminum eagle and wing our way to Seattle via Billings, Montana and Spokane, Washington, all of this in about thirteen days.

I wrote Delbert, my brother, a letter and told him what was happening. He was back in Oregon working for Chuck Hansen who was hauling lumber from a mill site near Cooston fairly close to Coos Bay. You guessed it. Delbert was now a truck driver.

Dad, Curt, and I did a bit of pheasant hunting over on McCollough Creek and chased some grouse, as they had coveyed up as they always do in the late fall. We had some shooting, but wild birds late in the season plus fewer birds due to the previous winter of '52, which was a winter that will remain remembered for all those that endured it.

I visited my grandparents (mom's folks). They had moved to Presho from Blunt, South Dakota and now lived south of the high school in a mobile home. We attended worship at Zion Lutheran Church. Rev. Shepherd was the pastor. Soon, my days were spent and I boarded a Convair twin-engine airplane, leaving Pierre for Billings, Montana, and then changed planes. Now on a DC-4 four-engine to continue the air miles left to Spokane and the last leg, Seattle.

We touched wheels on the acres of concrete runway about 10:30 pm, deplaned and were hailed by a sergeant in fatigues; three other G.I.s were on the flight, but this transportation was a bus painted olive drab and with appropriate white numbers on the bumpers having twenty plus incoming soldiers on it as we left Seattle-Tacoma airport headed through downtown to end up on the military scene of Ft. Lawton up on the west bluff overlooking Puget Sound. I had met my commitment. I was where my orders said I had to be on the day it stated to be there. So far, so good! It was now a few days before Christmas 1952.

PART TWO

"MY TOUR OF DUTY" 1952-1954

KOREA

My personal information was brought up to current status the following day at Ft. Lawton, the roster to be used to load the MSTS–Gen. Ballou, had my name typed very clear and unmistakably distinct (add very legible also). I was on it! But it didn't board until first week in January.

This meant I had what I felt was a good guess to be at least ten plus days to spend in Seattle. I did have relatives in Burien, suburb of Seattle. Two cousins…I would try to contact them, the next day. The transient incoming personnel would be put on guard duty from 6:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m. — 2 hours on, 4 hours off. This duty roster would remain effective for the duration of our stay or until the MSTS Ballou was ready for the troops to come onboard.

So, it was guard duty for me the first night after arriving at Ft. Lawton. It was a duck soup, easy duty, under a poncho and helmet liner. If you didn't walk your post too fast, you didn't get too wet. Rain was the welcoming ingredient, the indoctrination to Washington State. They let us sleep in until nine, then had a barracks inspection about 10:30 a.m. — mostly formality. We, if not on the guard duty roster had day passes until midnight. Pretty good duty! Maybe they knew something about Korea that we didn't?

While en route, specifically while visiting in the Presho area, Mr. and Mrs. George Gloe gave me their daughter's phone number in Seattle and told me to give her a call if time and conditions allowed. I could see nothing wrong with the time or conditions, so I yielded a dime to a payphone just outside the barrack's door. It was in the early evening, and after three rings I was talking with Donna, Gloe's daughter. She would have it no other way. I was invited to share dinner at her place the following evening. I just had finished guard duty, so it wouldn't hamper the invitation. The address she furnished was on Phinney Ridge, east of Ballard, but still west of Highway 99. A map in the phone book yielded a distance of three miles roughly. I made a sketch, and the next late afternoon dressed in winter O.D. uniform, I left the Ft. Lawton main gate and briskly set a pace to easily cover a mile in fifteen minutes. In less than an hour, I was viewing the front of a small bungalow with the proper street numbers above the front door. A '46 Chevy sedan graced the curb. I would be introduced to the driver I assumed as I raised my right hand to message my presence on the front door step.

Three seconds plus several muffled footsteps and the door moved inward to reveal, without a doubt, one in the same, a debutante from my hometown Presho. We embraced with a big hug and began twenty questions. Donna then blurted, "I want you to meet my fiancé." On cue, a handsome young man of soft spoken voice said, "I'm Bud. Just discharged from the Navy, Korean Theater. And, lucky me, I'm working for Western Telephone Company. This is my second week of being a civilian again." Our handshake loosened and I responded quickly with, "Korea. Yes. That's where I'm headed."

We exchanged what we thought of interest to each other, and got a call from the cook, "Dinner's ready!" We dined and caught up on what questions brought forth.

Bud and Donna took me to the main gate at close to midnight and coached me on catching the metro bus to save shoe leather, as I was invited back for another visit. I guess I hadn't said anything offensive, nor did I hear any of the same.

I found the right bus and shortened my travel time. Two days later, I was informed that we should take in the dance Saturday evening at the Paladium on Aurora Avenue (close to 125th Ave.) about four miles from Bud and Donna's place. I was attentive to the remark, "We should line up a date for you." A blind date. Who do I know, Bud pondered with hand on his chin, almost tormenting his memory. Then, as if a big flash of bright light hit him, he raised his arms and blurted, "My sister, that's who! She works at Lerner's clothing store." Donna agreed. "Why did it take us so long to think of your sis? Perfect."

I, at this choice by both, had a good feeling about this venture. Bud said, "I'll call her tomorrow. I hope she hasn't committed for Saturday night." Bud said he thought she had to work, but we'd pick her up at the store and come back here before we go dancing.

I went back to Ft. Lawton on the bus, checked Saturday guard duty roster…yahoo! I was not on the list for the weekend. I was letting my mind run wild. I hope she's cute, attractive, and talks, not all the time, but when I'm not. Visions of possible romance captivated my thoughts. I hope I will be accepted, not rejected. All these thoughts, then the logic of keeping things in perspective. Just relax, be yourself, don't talk too much about yourself, keep her at ease…just be yourself. I turned in for sleep. Only six hours until morning's reveille, the first assembly of the day.

Saturday was an unforgettable day, the daylight hours speculating on what the evening would bring. We were at the Northgate Mall when the store where Karla worked closed for the day. It was December and the light hours had spent their given brilliance mostly on the top side of the cloud cover today. Parked a scant thirty feet from the door, I reacted to the verbal utterance of the two upfront. "Here she comes," both said in unison. I exited the left hand rear door of the Chev and briskly went to the full glass store door and opened it for her. She smiled and before she could get by me, I said as I let the door close, "I'm your blind date for tonight." Smiling my best, I continued, "My name is Mel Dittman." As we walked toward the car, she remarked, "You have a very nice smile. I think we will enjoy the evening." Wow. I knew one thing now. I had to keep smiling!

Bud started the car as the rear door closed and I floated to the other side to enter the passenger side door. We were sitting in a Chevy, not touching each other, but really very close. As Karla and Bud conversed, I was thinking I've met her only a minute and thirty seconds ago…and wow! I can't think of anything I do not like about her. We, as planned, attended the Saturday night dance at the Paladium on Aurora Avenue. For me it was an evening that was as totally memorable as any dance I'd ever had the privilege to escort as fine and personable a beautiful young lady as this eighteen year old, easy to look at and easy to talk to, belle of the ball. Yes indeed, I was impressed by her demeanor and presence. Even today, this impression of our first meeting is still vivid in my memory. I must ask her if I may correspond with her while in Korea. I did. Yes, she was responsive, saying she'd write answers to my letters.

I spent the 1952-53 holidays with her as time allowed. Spending Christmas and New Year's Eve gave me special opportunity to meet Karla's mother and step-dad. The time we were together allowed both of us to get to know each other as far as an honest representation of ourselves. I definitely wanted to continue our acquaintance and friendship.

Time is ever moving. Soon, time was spent. A bulletin on the barrack's board spread the word, we as a group would board the MSTS Gen. Ballou on January 4th, 1953 at Pier 91, Seattle waterfront, Elliott Bay. We did just that.

The MSTS General Ballou was gently urged from Pier 91 by two tugboats. The big gray steel hulled troop ship reluctantly moved away from the dock as the two tugs churned the water, sending the appearance of wakes from beneath the aft deck, though hardly moving the entirety of this gray monster now detached from her mooring lines.

Five minutes has passed since the lines were cast away. The big hulking ship now on its own, emitted black smoke from her stack, shuddered under its effort to get underway. The decks were amass with soldiers dressed in Class "A" uniforms as we watched the big city side of Elliott Bay slowly slide by, our course put us in the shipping channel of Puget Sound on a heading of approximately true north until we eased left so as to slide by Point-No-Point, this putting us on a northwesterly travel line, Whidbey Island on our starboard. By noon, we would be into the Straits of Juan-de-Fuca, ever and gently altering our course until the bow was pointed westerly. Victoria, B.C. could be seen on the Canadian shoreline of our starboard front quarter.

All the troops calmly withdrew to their inner selves, thinking of home, reminiscing about their loved ones, already greatly missed; and the flip side of the coin wondering what this new assignment to the Korean Theater held as an offering. Lots of quiet pondering and speculation was the mood of the moment as we watched the distant shoreline slowly fade to a thin line. If a change of viewing was needed, go to the other side of the vessel. Presto! Hardly a dime's worth of subtle differences. Maybe the wind would be less crisp, as it was January. It was winter, at least on the calendar.

We ate a lunch back when we entered the strait. Now it was getting late in the afternoon. Dinner mess call would soon be the next assembly to consider. The Cadre on the ship kept telling us, "Chow down big time so you'll have something to puke up when we hit the great expanse," meaning the Pacific Ocean. Some of us scoffed at least inwardly, bolstering our own fortitude, for never ever, no, have never been seasick, never!

We ate our second meal with the smell of diesel fuel chasing us wherever we went. Can't get very far from the source for it is a part of the ship itself. This smell was the precursor for running to the head, or the side rail if topside and loudly calling the Irishman— O' ROURKE!

The mainland of the U.S. was not in sight when the roll call for breakfast was heard over the intercom. The troops moved to the mess hall by announcement over this intercom: each group and from what deck level was your cue. A guard roster or watch detail was formulated and put into use for the hours of darkness. No smoking permitted on deck during the hours of sunset to sunrise, or anytime you were on active guard duty. This duty was put into effect so if anybody decided to jump overboard (maybe swim back), there likely would be a possible chance for stopping this foolish act of cowardice which ultimately would be labeled a suicide.

Fortunately, all went well on my 2 hours on then 4 hours off, then 2 more hours on. This usually terminated the detail of being on watch. The weather was windy. White capped waves quartered into the ship from the starboard side, and it was cool. A winter ruled the ocean and all that was on it. Swells were increasing in height as we continued on westerly headings.

A week had passed. Our overhead flights of seabirds had all but diminished. A few gulls remained, sometimes perched on the ship hitching a ride. They seemed to not care to where. They harvested the garbage from the ship's mess halls every day as it was put overboard on schedule to appease the greedy gulls.

During the next day, the sea became very rough which made the ship roll and pitch, at times when the sequence was just right or wrong, the bow would raise and then fall with a resounding crash sending a tremendous shudder through the entire hull of the ship. The screws would be partially out of the water lending their input as their blades beat a thudding rhythm to the battle of the sea against man's method of transport. The storm was severe enough to alter the original route, which was the most direct to Japan (north of the Hawaiian Islands). The intensity of the storm on this first chosen passage had modified our voyage. Now we were prudently on a course that would take us south of these mid-Pacific islands. This change would impact our arrival time by days as the ship was running at reduced power so as to lessen the affect of the heavy seas. At times, no one except ship's crew allowed on the main deck.

Those that had mentally put up a barrier in their minds, that they were too tough and well adjusted to ever become seasick, were experiencing a change of personal worth and ego. Once the smell of vomit permeated the decks inside the hold of the transport, plus when coupled with the already heavy scent of diesel (bunker fuel), it was almost impossible to fend off this combination and keep your last eaten meal in your own personal boiler room. I joined the last few to summon the Irishman from the sea — O' ROURKE claimed over ninety percent of the troops onboard. It was a stench that was high on the scale of "world's worst odors." No one died from it, but a few may have wished that they might.

The weather abated after four days and the troops rejoiced. Color came back to their faces. They cleaned up the quarters and settled into the remainder of the voyage, most of them above decks watching the birds and waves of the endless Pacific. We were days behind our schedule. Prayers answered, the "land ho!" from the uppermost bridge level deck. See off on the port front barely discernable, a sliver or dark something pushing up from the western horizon. Rumor or fact, it had to be Japan! The count of seagulls multiplied as the land mass grew in size. Darkness revealed the unmistaken proof of habitation: lights confirmed this observation. We were looking into the harbor of Tokyo, the capital of Japan, home of near nine million people.

A pilot boat had met the MSTS Gen. Ballou during the night, and when we emerged topside to view our location in the early morning hours, we were securely tied to a huge dock. The motion of the boat was so rock stable it almost was too much of a physical gift. Everyone had a smile on their face. We had endured a supreme test, the forces of Mother Nature while crossing the great Pacific Ocean. She had been merciful and lets us win this one. Solid footing was the welcome environment that we as landlubbers could quietly celebrate. It had a tremendously calming effect on every one of the soldiers, obviously appetites and humor returned to the many who had been so miserable with seasickness and flu. Or, was the latter a residual side effect of being seasick?

We moved down the gang plank, about four feet wide with steel poles, three feet above the plank supporting three fairly taught one-inch diameter manila ropes to keep the flow of foot traffic on the twenty-foot length of the assembly moving forward and off of the big gray ship. We loaded on waiting trucks to be processed through quarter master supply stores. We kept our wool winter O.D. dress uniform and our boots that were spit shined and by now well broken in. First issued items: fatigue uniforms, three pair each, three underwear, six pair wool socks, then a set of kaki summer dress uniform. (You might have to march in a parade, or I thought that would be nice to wear when we left Korea. A bit of preemptive thinking…we hadn't even been there yet). Our last portion of issue was a steel pot helmet with liner, and cloth bandoleer of ammo that held four clips of eight .30-06 rounds (a count of thirty-two). Then we each were handed an armory checked and tested M-1 Garand semi-automatic rifle, standard issue firearm for the infantry of the

U.S. Army and Marines. We tankers hoped this would be exchanged for what tankers call their personal firearm, a 1911 .45 cal semi-automatic pistol. Light enough that if you run out of ammo, you can throw it as a last resort.

We now evidently were ready for Korea. The trucks took us back to the big gray MSTS ship. We went to our quarters, same as on the voyage across the blue Pacific. As soon as all were present or accounted for, the Nippon tug service eased the big ship out into navigable waters and soon we were back in the smell of diesel fumes. But, the waters were calm, flat and glassy. We headed around the southern end of the Japanese main island leaving a wake that remained visible for miles from the fantail of the troop ship. Night fell and in the early a.m., a land mass was visible off the bow of the MSTS Gen. Ballou. The yellow sea was beneath the hull, and we were headed in toward the ever-growing thickness of the dark line called terra firma.

By noon we were ready to transfer (board) a naval LST type shallow-water landing vessel. The calm seas were reason to rejoice as this mass movement of personal gear and personal gear and personnel was without incident. We kept eyes on the water and in the sky. Not good to be vulnerable to air attack in our pre-departure briefing we were told. "Our flyboys have secured the airspace and are on patrol of this sector today." A very comforting bit of information.

Our combat boots and fatigue trousers were dripping wet. The bow ramp of the naval vessel was deployed and the troops in well-disciplined order separated from "sea going" status to the familiar Navy jargon description of "land lubber ground pounder." We were in South Korea, on the beach at Inchon, west side of the peninsula, south of the 38° parallel. A train waited within marching distance. We stood in formation as a briefer told us where we were and what to expect in the next 12 hours. And yes, you will take your M-1 Garand rifles on the train. No, you will not be on a buffalo hunt like the old Wild West days, but rather to defend yourself should the train come under attack, as infiltrators had been somewhat active as of late. Hm-m-m. Yes. This revelation brings a bit more perspective to the potential reality of our vulnerability while clickity-clackin' down the railroad track whistling our presence en route to a replacement depot where we as individuals will part and go to our assigned units. Hopefully, we'll have the appropriate training to fill in for a soldier rotating out. Yes, he served his time. He survived the perils. Now he's going home to drive the highways and byways (where there is real danger).

Asia — Prior To "Tour Of Duty"

An overview for those that were not there (Korea), and also for those that engage in browsing thru this attempt to illuminate the past, and why I was along with thousands of other servicemen. Now in late January of 1953, sightseeing in an Asian country embroiled in conflict with the upper half, North Korea. First deduction: It's a civil war, the north against the south. Let's see what world history along with American choices has to relate.

During the few years after WWII, the attention of American political powers was focused on China. Currently Chiang Kaishek, the ruler and guiding force for the big country. For years he'd been busy in conflict with the Chinese communists, led by Mao Zedong. Already in 1945, Mao's Army held a big area in the north of China. Chiang troops and forces held the southern portion. Chiang's forces had been supported by the American dollars, but due to corruption in Chiang

Kaishek's poorly organized government, he lost considerable support from the U.S. and in 1949, the forces of Chiang were in great haste to leave the China mainland, retreating to Taiwan as a refuge from having to face Mao's Communist Army that had pushed them to the beaches. A hundred miles of ocean to Taiwan, a place of survival for the now ex ruler of China, and his devoted followers.

The communist victory by Mao Zedong's meant that the largest nation in Asia was now totally under communist rule. Although there was much debate between Mao and the Soviet Union when Mao set up the People's Republic of China, nonetheless the two countries managed an ongoing political association, each not trusting the other when they couldn't see each other. Being neighbors was the ultimate cohesive bond; they lived next door to each other. The realization was clear. Between these two communist nations, they now controlled over one-fourth of the Earth's landmass. This caused many people to worry and fret with due cause. Would communism take over all of Asia and then try for more? American concerns were at high levels when war broke out in Korea in 1950.

Korea had been a Japanese colony from 1911 until the outbreak of this new conflict. After WWII, Korea was divided at the 38° parallel (don't know the specific reason). The Soviet Union supported the northern portion, and the United States backed a non-communist government in South Korea. My feet now touched the ground of this new republic. I was here in a brand new country. But there were sightings that it was not new and untarnished, but used and suffering.

President Truman chose Douglas MacArthur, an experienced general from World War II days, to champion our cause. MacArthur had spent most of his career in the combat zones of the Asian sector of our world. MacArthur went in haste to South Korea. His orders were simply to push the North Koreans out of South Korea. These forces that were rallied under the validity of the United Nations consisted mostly of Americans. Yes, close to 80%, mobilized and rushed into South Korea, from Japan. The rest of the counts were ROK soldiers (Republic of Korea).

The U.N. forces were poorly equipped. The North Koreans had new Soviet tanks, T-34s. Our forces had only the leftover WWII equipment and weapons for this difficult campaign.

In August of 1950, the North Koreans had near control of almost all of South Korea. MacArthur at this time launched a surprise counter attack from the sea, landing behind enemy lines at Inchon (same place we left the troop ship two plus years later). Surprising the enemy, the U.N. forces swept eastward. Another group of U.N. forces pushed and clawed their way up from the south, and together the two units pushed the invaders back across the 38° parallel.

President Truman wanted to punish the North Koreans for their aggressive, but now wasted attempt to occupy the total Korean peninsula. The plan now was to push the violators back into North Korea (being approved by the U.N.). Gen. MacArthur met with success as this new offensive attempt unfolded. However, the third player arises out of the dust and clamor: the People's Republic of China shows itself, stern faced and powerful. The message sent to the U.N. forces and the United States: "We will not stand idly by and watch you invade North Korea."

When the U.N. forces neared the Chinese border, thousands of Chinese troops crossed the Yalu River into North Korea. The mass numbers of Chinese reinforcements turned the action to retreat for the U.N. forces, pushing them back from whence they had come. This was met with much public disagreement and concern by America and the U.N.

Gen. MacArthur got on his high horse with his walking cane, regaining control of South Korea by March of 1951. He now voiced his solution to win this contest. He stated that the

United States could only win this war by attacking China (perhaps a long term campaign). So, the General requested publicly for supporting the bombing of supply bases in China.

Truman, being more cautious, wanted to have a limited war and restore the 38° line between the two countries. The President also believed that bombing bases in China might, yes very possibly could, trigger a new world war. MacArthur continued to complain and be vindictive toward politicians in Washington. This riled the President to no end. He was furious to say the least. He fired his self-appointed General. This angered many of the citizens of our country. When Gen. MacArthur returned stateside, he was given a hero's celebration, parade and all.

The political scene had modified to some degree—it was 1951. But it was hard to detect any progress. In 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected our President. Ike promised during election speeches that he would go to Korea to try and move the peace talks off of top dead center. I am in South Korea while all this mediation for peaceful co-existence is being drafted and there've been days when peace had fled the scene.

At the replacement depot somewhere near Seoul. Three weeks into January 1 9 5 3. Seven tankers assigned to 8 9th Tank Battalion. I am kneeling, on right.

We pick up here with my experiences and encounters as a Private, U.S. Army, Armor Basic Training, assigned to the 89th Tank Battalion – Company A, 1st Platoon – (attached to the 25th Infantry Division). The date is late in January of 1953. The unit (battalion) is in ready reserve, bivouacked in the Chorwon Valley (central portion of the north-south landmass of Korea). We

are six miles behind the MLR (Main Line of Resistance). It is cold, 20° F. Light snow shows in the air intermittently. It is a sobering sort, an impending mood, sullen and spooky. I bolster my convictions. I have to get through all this. I shall write to my newfound pen pal in Seattle. I've had some pleasant dreams that are going to make life worth whatever it takes to get back to see this charming young lady. A wishful thought, one that has a definite niche in my memory banks.

Ready Reserve, of the 8 9th Tank Battalion. Out of sight protected by the big ridge. Left in the Chorwon Valley: about three miles direct front to the MLR.

The first night is filled with a fireworks show. This ready reserve unit of Company A–89th Tank Battalion is positioned behind a fairly sharp rise in the terrain. The tanks and tents are strung out along the 300 yards of the highest ridge elevation. An artillery round incoming could not hit a tank or tent if it cleared the ridge. It would land beyond the encampment. If short, it would hit the front slope of the terrain. A good choice of using what is of positive for survival.

The tankers that had been in this outfit said, "This is what we call harassing fire. Both sides try to keep everyone awake all night." Quad .50 cal half-tracks were a mile from us, up closer to the front line. They also had a big searchlight within a couple hundred yards which helped watch for enemy troop movements or infiltrators across the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). These units usually had several positions they could move to after firing from one of them. This kept the enemy artillery guessing as to where they'd fire from next time. At times, the sky was streaked with tracer line from the quad-fifties. Some nights, random artillery could be heard go overhead whistling, only to explode down range, throwing dirt, rocks, and dust into the air. Shrapnel has a death

sound as it whines outward like a ricochet bullet. It was almost as if they were aware that fresh replacements had arrived. Little sleep was absorbed that first night.

I'm assigned to the platoon sergeant's tank serving as the loader, meaning I have to pull rounds for the 75mm gun from the ammo wells in the turret floor. And, it must be what the Tank Commander calls for when firing at targets of opportunity. The tanks carry basically four types of rounds for the big bore turret gun. H.E. (high explosive), Shot (steel projectile), Hyper-Shot (high velocity, tungsten carbide core for deep penetration, anti-tank round), and the fourth type called Smoke (white phosphors, high heat, used for smoke screens. My Tank Commander is Sfc. Booker; my platoon leader is 2nd Lt. Valentine. In tank 16. The number one says it is 1st Platoon and the number six denotes the platoon leader, a commissioned officer, commands it. The platoon leader has three of the platoon's tanks in his section. The platoon Sgt. has two tanks in his section, which makes for five tanks in a platoon. Tanks have numbers on the turrets to denote as to which section they belong, tanks 12 and 13 are the platoon Sgts., tanks 14, 15, and 16 are the platoon leaders section. But all five are controlled ultimately by the 2nd Lt. Commissioned Officer, the platoon leader.

As I mentioned earlier, Sgt. Booker was my Tank Commander. Cpl. Nevin Smith, the driver. The gunner, capable Staff Sgt. Ray Collins, the bow gunner was a ROK soldier, and I was the loader…this filling out the crew count at five. I was not the huskiest person, but my farm related past and Basic Training had conditioned me to handle this job of loader with ease. As with most new environments, the bottom is the place to start, for that is where your best talents and skill levels will carry you to those waiting opportunities. I absolutely will do my very best.

Guard duty was as always, the necessary security wherever you are. The duty rolled around twice a week. This detail was always very stressful. Your alertness was in demand at all times. Control over one's imagination was a tough exercise. Sounds and moving shadows were only Korean civilians roaming around not knowing of their extreme peril. Being in reserve status, the guards walked their posts. Briefings were held prior to posting time (dark) with the duty officer and the Sgt. of the guard. We would be advised as to what we could expect tonight. This update was a relay of information as to location and who was in front, on the flanks, or any significant intelligence they could gather. The password was always committed to memory. But only worked for those that knew it. Often ROK soldiers (the ones we were helping) would never answer with anything but "Hey G.I.," when you were challenged, and you just hoped they'd go away…not get close. I know that a North Korean looked exactly like a South Korean, especially in a South Korean uniform. Guard duty was a high stress level duty. It was in my mind, high risk to use your flashlight. It became a beacon for a bullet. If you had to use it, hold it at arms length to the side of your body.

When on perimeter security guard duty, we carried the M-1 .30 cal carbine along with our issued personal firearm, a .45 cal 1911 model semi-automatic pistol.

Time moved along quite rapidly. Our section tanks 12 (the one I am loader in) and tank 13 moved up on-line taking the place of two tanks from the 2nd Platoon of A Company. Bunkers were constructed by our people out of 12' x 12' x 8' or 10' long wood timbers, then covered over with sandbags. The entrance to these bunkers had a 90° turn in them, this to keep shrapnel out. Our tank was placed in what the military calls: a defilade position (protected by the terrain). These defensive sites had been made by a tank dozer, and so was the excavation for the bunker. The tank turret was on the same level plain as the relief in the front berm of earth. The gun tube

barely cleared this pushed up ridge. Thru this firing lane, one could see the enemy trenches a mere thousand yards out front and in daylight could see trace movements with binoculars in them.

Again guard duty during hours of darkness. Two crewmen awake, one in the tank to monitor the radio and one on perimeter guard. The Tank Commander would send out a relief to take your place every two hours. We used the same password for the day as the ready reserve area we had just moved out from. The Jeep driver would bring us one hot meal a day provided he could run the quarter-mile of visible open road to get it to us. Often, the "gooks" as we called those north of us, would throw a few rounds of artillery at him as he sped across this open stretch. It was anything but funny, as the road was not smooth and it appeared that his speed was near 30 mph. He was then exposed thirty seconds as he crossed this open terrain.

Nights showed the same harassing fire as we had witnessed back in reserve. Now we were in the midst of it. Some nights, an inventory must be taken of rounds of ammo to see how much was left…occasionally this prevailed. It was a welcome relief.

A week up on-line under cover of darkness, we were relieved. This time we went all the way back to battalion reserve… this about eight miles from the front.

89th tank battalion was more Army than the ready reserve and front-line duty. We now went to classes, reviewing and learning new skills needed for survival. Primarily bunker building, radio operation updates and procedures, how to see better at night, how to listen and determine what you hear, how to chamber load your .45 with scarcely an audible sound. The sergeants and platoon leaders did most of the instruction. The medics gave first aid refreshers and splint applications. The Army does not let you sleep, even if you think you need it.

Back at battalion. Sgt. Tanner from West Virginia and myself, both adept with an Army shovel. We've just dug a new sump for the tent kitchen and mess tent.

On a certain day in February back in this battalion reserve, classes had been held in the a.m. concerning the .50 cal heavy machine gun, of which all the tanks had turret-mounted just forward of the Tank Commander's hatch. We had explored and reviewed the guns capabilities and function. We had left the hands-on class area (the tank itself) for a much needed coffee break. The mass of G.I.s sauntered toward the mess tent to drink the black varnish remover brand G.I. coffee. However, a tanker who was rotating home in several days (he was in the 1st Platoon like I was) approached me with a question, "Would I please consider trading my spit shined smooth leather boots for his rough-outs, plus an electric shaver, and another plus, a nice little battery powered radio." He said batteries were available at battalion PX. (Yes, at double tent was the PX, which means post-exchange: varied merchandise for sale). He followed with a pleading wishful thinking exclamation, "I just gotta wear those boots home."

An instant later, there was a shattering short burst from a close proximity .50 cal machine gun. Three rounds I recall. The trader and I hit the floor inside my tent where my boots were. A voice outside broke the sudden silence, "Hey! Soldier! What in hell are you doing? Get off the tank now!"

We got to our feet and saw two beams of sunlight shining through the slope of the roof panel, that side to the near side of the tank. We bolted for the entry flap and emerged unscathed. Oh, lucky day! Two rounds through the tent right at head high. Evidently, not for either of us. Now that's what might have been noted as "killed by friendly fire."

As the fiasco unraveled and a crowd of returning coffee breakers gathered, the soldier (a new recent replacement G.I.) was still on top of the tank holding the aft handles of the .50…he was scared, he was shaking. The Tank Commander of the tank came and climbed up alongside this young soldier and calmly asked him, "What did you do?" The gun was still loosely held, but restrained by the forward barrel clamp. But the evidence was there on the top of the turret where the short burst gouged the turret as they ricocheted through the tent we were in.

The inquisitive and curious young soldier had climbed up to investigate the gun. He knew that to load the chamber of the .50, it was necessary to pull the receiver bolt handle to the rear of travel, twice. He said he only pulled it once. He then pressed the butterfly thumb trigger between the handgrips and "da-da-da" big time. The Company Commander was on the scene now. He invited the Tank Commander and the Private who had fired this weapon by his irresponsible action to come with him to his tent. The event was over, but not the fallout. Two days later, the Private was busted back to Recruit status and the Tank Commander who carried Staff Sgt. stripes was now back to Corporal. The analysis of this military justice was: Last night's air raid red alert had everyone out of the tents and in their respective alert stations. It was determined that the .50 cal machine gun on tank 14 could not have been fired by the Private, as he the Private only operated the receiver bolt "once." Therefore, the Tank Commander himself had already half-loaded the gun at sometime during the air raid alert the previous early a.m. (No excuse soldier).

The boots went stateside, the shaver worked and the radio played. I now wore a rotatee's rough-outs. They fit quite comfortable. I could stand most anything today, for there was a letter for me at mail call, postmarked from Seattle. I trembled like a puppy as I opened it. Yes, it was from my pen pal, Karla L. Bridgham. I swallowed hard to try and stop my tearing eyes.

Two weeks later, we had support mission to accomplish; a two day before jump off date briefing revealed the 1st Platoon of Company A had been chosen to back up a ROK attempt to re-take Hill 369 which was commanding terrain for the valley. We would relieve the first section after they had fired up their expendable ammo while they return to the ammo dump to replace the spent

now empty magazine. We would stay in our defilade position until told to pull back. The supporting fire initiated for delivery was intended to impact a hundred yards in front of ROK infantry. Their progress periodically marked by the use of green colored smoke grenades.

Photo taken by me on my birthday March 11th, 1953. On-line supporting the ROK infantry as they re-take Hill 369. Tank (center) has just fired a round—to the north.

The attack started at first adequate light. The hill was about a half-mile from our firing revetments. The first section: three tanks called on the radio and said they would move out in approximately twelve minutes, leaving the access in-road wide open as they went by to replenish the spent ammo. We then, would scoot in and use the warmed up, very same firing spot.

We rolled in hiding their tracks, the driver kept the engine at an idle, our gunner traversed the 75mm gun tube to align on the hill now under siege; a small bright green blossom grew bigger on the slope trenches that were visible.

Sgt. Booker's voice crackled into my headset, "Load H.E." I lifted the 75mm round, sliding the casing forward, right hand closed, fingers tucked in, until the rim on the shell base tripped the gun's receiver block, closing and pushing my hand clear. I responded, "H.E. - Clear!" The gun was loaded, and I was clear of its recoil travel. Sgt. Booker was now verifying with Ray the gunner, that both were seeing the same picture, Ray through the telescope sight and the Sgt. through his binoculars. "Be sure you're 100 yds. plus on the green smoke. Fire when ready." Five seconds. "On the way," Ray's voice announced. WHAM. The tank rocked back. The empty shell casing clattered on the turret floor. Cordite smoke oozed from the open chamber end of the gun. Quick, turn on the turret blower fan. I did. "Load H.E.," hit my ears followed by the gunner's comment,

"Just right on." Sgt. Booker comes on, says, "See that trench a bit beyond the first round?" I've a new shiny round loaded. Booker again, "Add 50. Fire when ready." WHAM. Rock back again, more clattering of big brass on the floor, smoke invades the turret space once more.

Even with turret fan running, smoke filled the compartment and I was overcome by its effects. I had to open my hatch and get my head out of the turret to gasp a breath of air. The gun smoke was making me super sick. I gazed at the hill in front of us, then I looked behind us and I saw the lines of tracers going past our tank. We were being shot at! One of these tracers nearly missed my head. Yes, this combat stuff has two sides: Shooting at and being shot at! A sobering event and a revelation all in one moment…you can't see incoming tracers, if you do you're still okay. "Get the hell inside the turret, you fool!" A personal reprimand!

We continued to fire our 75mm, then a slight lull in the noise and smoke. Oh thanks for a slowdown! I'm sick because I've sucked in so much cordite (gun powder) smoke I have to heave. I lurch up and partially out of my hatch and vomit breakfast on the outside of the turret. I am so sick I'm afraid I won't die. Then it occurs to me, you can't die on your birthday! True. On this day March 11, 1953, I had turned another year. I was now 22.

We raided the strike frequency and requested replacement tanks. We were low on ammo for the 75mm, which our model Sherman E-8 tank had for firepower at this time. At this time, the radio came back with, "2nd Platoon as a problem, a tank has hit a mine, is disabled, track blown off, is experiencing incoming mortar and bigger. Location is on far right of our support line."

A tank retriever was sent in to drag the crippled tank to a place behind terrain that would be out of view. A smoke screen could be seen to our right. It had to be put there to provide a screening for the tank retriever to make its hook-up and tow. We moved out of our position and went the mile or so to the ammo cache.

After the A.D. sky raiders made several drops of napalm on the backside of the hill, things had quieted down. The ROK soldiers had retaken the objective and we were ordered to hold where we were, still loading the ammo in the turret floor magazines.

The hook-up scenario with the disabled tank did not go well. The exec officer of our Able Company was seriously wounded by shrapnel, stomach area, and had to be helicopter evacuated to an Army med station far from the Main Line of Resistance (MLR) that we were part of. The 1st Lt. survived, but did not come back to our outfit.

I recovered from breathing the thick gun smoke of the turret that day. The torment of memories remains to remind me of that twenty-second birthday spent on the front line in Korea.

The peace talks continued at Panmunjom at times the North Korean negotiators would throw their hands in the air and walk out of a session, for reasons we thought were remote and petty…stall, stall…but for what? Did they think we'd just pack up and go home? While all this haggling and concessions was going on, we maintained a deliberation to hold whatever threats the North could initiate. Patrols, theirs and ours often clashed in the "no mans land" (Demilitarized Zone). This action kept the peace efforts in a state of disruptive co-existence—our stance was defense and theirs was aggression.

It was common on nice spring days to see air sorties return from making reconnaissance flights. I recall vividly a flight of F-86's brilliant polished alum, with bright chrome yellow trim, swoop down and pass not more than a hundred yards distant. The pilots wave and we do too …exhilarating to say the least. Then watch them at their jet noise best, climb at a shallow angle headed back to Japan or Kimpo Air Force Base in South Korea. The insignia of the white star on blue background, painted to identify this modern and highly technical advancement in air power,

is an achievement to hold in high esteem and be mighty proud to witness. Truly a great accomplishment.

The moves we as a battalion experienced were quite frequent. Whatever the 25th Inf. Div. Did, we were a part of it. Skirmishes still were part of the everyday life of the doughboy (infantryman) the ground pounder, the soldier that if he wanted to travel, most of the time it was on foot. We as tankers in combat came to ultimately realize, that while riding, your energy and your boots lasted much longer; but without doubt, this type of conveyance always attracted one hell of a lot of attention. The enemy was always committed to destroy it.

At the railhead, west side of the Chorwon Valley, abandoning our last encampment for a train ride. The season is late May '5 3.

Early May of 1953 ushered in a major move for the 89th tank battalion. The last half of this month saw the three companies Able, Baker, and Charlie plus Hdqtrs. Co. on the road in the Chorwon Valley moving to a railroad loading site. The Army Corps of Engineers had built this flatcar loading dock. We drove the tanks on the flatbed railroad car…two tanks on each car, secured by chocks and chain linked come-alongs. We did not know our destination, but knew that it might be of significant distance. Otherwise, why the train? I'll bet the train engineer knew!

Checking the chocks and the downs. All tanks on board. Who is that guy on the right? Not a North Korean spy I hoped.

It was twilight when all the heavy stuff was deemed travel ready. The jeeps, trucks, and water trailers, ambulances and anything on rubber tires were relegated to road travel. We hoped they'd get there before we did.

The train huffed and puffed and thought it could many times that night. The tank crews remained within their tanks on the flatcars. The clickity-clack was a way to gauge and guess the speed when moving. No lights allowed—black out conditions prevailed. "C" rations and the water in our canteens afforded the luxury of riding Korean orange blossom special that night under clear skies and a bright moon. We were not able to gather the sleep to make for cordial and happy G.I.s. The train ride came to a successful close the next 11:30am, as the tired old black steamer hooted a celebration song on its whistle and finally eased to a much desired refrain from forward motion. The engine, though not moving, was still hissing and emitting the sounds of travel.

All the crews were now out on their tanks, some emptying their pee bottles so they could use them again. No coffee this morning. Our canteens were empty also, but each tank had five gallons of water strapped to the turret backside.

The offload dock master was getting the tanks unrestrained and soon we were seeing them move off of the railroad flatcars in short order, much quicker than it had taken to load them. Soon the whole battalion had formed up on the road and we were convoy-spaced and moving at about

25mph to the west, as the sun indicated. The calendar said it was near the middle of May 1953, although it was still hush-hush as to where in Korea we were, the secret was soon disclosed as we traveled. The terrain rose slightly, and then crested. Wahla! There on our left front was unmistakably: the Yellow Sea. Yes! We were on the western front, just south of the Imjin River.

This river was not quite as big as the Missouri River, but nonetheless a natural geographical barrier, tough to get any troops or equipment across to the other side, north or south. It gave us a justifiable sense of security. Our stress levels dropped a couple of clicks.

When we rolled into our bivouac areas, the mess tent was up and tents for each line Company were waiting, folded yet but with everything there to assemble and erect the faded green canvas into a shelter from sun, rain, and wind. All that was needed now was a deliberate sense of commitment for manpower to complete the transformation from not just being available, but to the reality of being a time-tested shelter; our home for us as long as it remained erect and tied down.

Much work was done in the next few days, some of it with getting a Company shower set up. Latrines to dig, and kitchen sumps to give the cooks time for preparing our nourishment "just like mom did when we were at home being spoiled." This was their approach to keeping us thinking how lucky we were to have such capable Army chefs to prepare chipped beef gravy on toast and scrambled eggs that carried all the body's need for calcium due to the high content of eggshells blended in.

The building of bunkers and revetments on the high ground above the mighty Imjin River used the rest of the head count of each Company, three of them: Able, Baker, and Charlie, each designated to their own sector of the defensive perimeters and positions. The harassing fire was still a part of the night scene, intended to keep the pressure and stress levels elevated. Good sleep was a premium luxury, a much needed salve and conditioner for good mental responses and reactions.

We settled in on the south banks of the big river. Reminded me a bit of the Missouri through the Dakota's mid-section elevated breaks up and off of the flood plain on both sides. We are a half-mile from the water and enjoy commanding terrain. We have greater elevation and look down on the total landscape. The river is quite wide, like the Missouri, but not nearly as muddy.

We take our turns being rotated up on line, and then in about five days, we'd rotate back into Company reserve. It was about a three-mile distance, the way the Korean crow flies. (Yes, they are black, like ours). It was very similar on-line here as it had been in the central Chorwon area. We had relieved a Marine armored recon. Group, inheriting all of what previously had been their efforts.

Our mission was primarily surveillance of the river and movement on the other side. Reporting the movements, as the Panmunjom Peace Talks were still in session, the mediation stayed at a slow pace. We were under strict orders: Don't fire until fired upon.

The sector reports concerning action and types of action always carried info on the North Korean attempts to swim or float across the river at night, stay immobile and out of sight during daylight and conduct guerilla type action at night; sabotage our trucks with sand in the oil, cut the lower radiator hoses, and whatever havoc they could administer. So, guard duty remained a priority calling with all of the potentials of danger and high alertness. The relished call to serve and protect those you depended on—your buddies.

The most vivid memories of this western front happened when Able Company was in battalion reserve. The date was about two weeks into June 1953. The weather was June picture perfect. We

were getting some good sleep these past few days. The peace talks seemed to at least have hope for changing this conflict into a qualified peace. We all silently sent mental communiqués to the Almighty General from above asking His power to make it happen.

We awoke to the sound of the "red alert" siren. The luminous dial on my Timex yielded a time of 12:20am. The scramble that ensued put us out of our squad tent and running to our tanks about 50 yards away, fatigues not belted up yet, boots untied, a shirt with one arm in it, my side arm in its holster but slung over my arm by the pistol belt. Steel pot on my head, everything battling and scuffing as we ran toward our iron coffins, as we often reference to them.

Into the familiar insides, turn on the soft red light inside the turret. Quickly turn on the radios, one on the Company channel, and the other on battalion. The radio is our only way to stay current regarding this red alert now only seconds old.

We listened, heads under steel helmets at shoulder level to the open hatches. The moon was near full. It looked not quite round yet. It was magnificent as the nightlight of the dark side of the Earth. If the print was bold enough tonight, you could read by it. But I didn't bring a book or anything like that. So we sat in the calm of the quietness waiting for the radio to be our great informer as to what's what on the western front.

An hour passed. No news. I looked to the southern horizon and was held in that direction by the realization that the sky above the horizon was slowly turning into a soft yellow-white glow. "What in the hell is going on under that illuminated area? That's about where Seoul would-should be?" The radio remained mute.

We watched the southern sky continue to brighten. Five minutes more. The alert had now been established for almost an hour. The radio finally sputtered and echoed, the mike switch on the sending transmitter. The Company radio was active. "Black Jaguar (Able Company). This is your Company Commander. The city of Seoul and Kimpo Airbase are under air attack. The sky to the south is evidence of huge fires. The gas dump in that locale is burning." (Pause) "This is an order: Should any…any aircraft be in our vicinity while this alert is in effect, you will not, repeat, you will not fire upon the aircraft. No smoking and all lights shut down. You will be advised as to termination of the alert. This is your Company Commander, out." Why the no fire order? Nobody likes their location known. A dozen .50 calibers throwing tracers into the heavens shows a concentration of targets for artillery, the enemy's big guns. No thank you, please! Silence was a transparent veil. It covered us once more, leaving us guess.

A few minutes melted into five. At first I thought I heard a light very slight light tapping sound. Then I didn't hear it again. Oops! There it is again, getting more distinct, more audible. What is it? In ten seconds we were listening to a radial aircraft engine, presumably attached to an airframe, and presumably flown by a pilot and possibly a crew of one or two aboard. We listened and we waited. Louder it came. The moon was bright, but it was not until it got close enough to see the blue exhaust flames being spit out of the ports on the engine that we located the intruder. It came on a line from the south at about two hundred feet above ground level and silhouetted its totality against the big yellow moon, beating out a rhythmic staccato pulse of an uncowled radial engine. What a memorable picture it was. The pilot was very visible in the open cockpit of this slow flying biplane, evidently a trainer of sorts looking to be very similar to our primary flight trainers, namely the Waco UPF-7 or Boeing Stearman.

It continued to cross the river on a northerly heading, soon far enough away to not be heard, or seen. It had no lights to betray itself, or maybe no battery even if it did have lights.

By 2:30am, the alert was terminated and at first formation (reveille), the Captain filled us in on the basic picture he had been privileged to obtain.

The North Korean Communists evidently wanted to send a message to the peace makers, that they were still there across the 38° parallel's Demilitarized Zone (no mans land) and they were still mad as hell and this is just one of the things we're capable of. They did it. It was unexpected and they used outmoded equipment to do it with, and probably volunteers for this calculated high-risk mission.

The final score after several days of investigation, evaluation, compiling an outcome from all those involved, meaning those in Seoul and at Kimpo Airbase.

The gaggle of less than ten had presumably formed up at a small field just north of the delta of the big Imjin River. They, all bi-plane 100mph-training planes, headed out into the Yellow Sea just above the surface of the water. The night was made to order. When out to sea far enough, the drone of the engines likely could not be detected as they flew south down the coastline keeping below radar scans, an hour south out at sea, then make a 90° left turn and head inland to intersect the objectives of the mission—Seoul and Kimpo Airbase.

However, at Kimpo there was a small contingency of Navy pilots, a night fighter group that flew radar-equipped planes (Corsairs), the bent wing proven fighter of WWII. One pilot did manage to intercept this formation of ¼ his airspeed potential. He scattered the biplanes while they were dropping incendiaries by hand from the open cockpits of these outmoded war machines. Bazaar as it was, much like a re-enactment of the beginning of military aviation in WWI.

The Navy pilot said the fact that his radar equipped Corsair was so much faster than the "bipes," he had a tendency to overrun the target on radar imaging. When the gutsy biplanes withdrew, if my recall is correct, only three were headed back north, and one of them directly over our back yard. The Naval aviator in the Corsair night fighter became what I read afterward: "The only Naval fighter pilot to be classified as an "Ace," regarding this recent skirmish over Seoul. There was confirmation for five destroyed aircraft of biplane configuration, an outlandish, bazaar and gutsy caper by North Korean airpower.

The news spread and was soon regarded as old. The gas dump that burned was now being rebuilt. The daily news from the peace seekers at Panmunjom was that they were still mediating. Finally, in July of '53, the two sides reached enough common ground to sign a cease-fire. They had also come to a mutual decision to set the 38° parallel as a Demilitarized Zone—where no troops shall be in this zone from either side.

Tensions between North and South Korea still remained. From time to time, infractions of the Demilitarized Zone caused a crisis between each of the nations. However, and so far, none lead to the start of another conflict.

We settled into a new type Army life style, one of keeping busy with refresher classes. I was a Cpl. now and was teaching a class to my platoon on assembly and disassembly on the .45 cal semi-automatic pistol, our personal firearm as tankers. The class consisted of hands-on disassembly, cleaning, and assembly, also tips on proper grip and sight picture, the trigger-squeeze then the recoil recovery and realignment on the target. The classes were about an hour to an hour and a half in duration. All the non-Coms shared this duty. The Company Commander pushed this program. The tanks were also classrooms. The Army's slogan "we've done a days work by 9:00am" was not far from the truth.

I was selected to go to a non-Com leadership school in late July. The site was inland and south of our western front position. Scuttlebutt had it that we were going to get new tanks soon, which meant more familiarization and classes if we did indeed phase out our EE-8 Shermans.

In non-Com leadership school mid-August of '5 3. Heat of summer and a tough schedule was the barometer of your abilities.

I lost ten pounds during the course of this school, which was a grueling test of building self-confidence and lack of sleep. Classes all day and night problems most of the night. The latter, a well-designed course of how to find your way back to camp in the total darkness with a map and a compass.

Another phase of the class agenda was to be able to identify weapons by the sounds they made. Also how to set up explosives, and also how to set up defensive fronts with napalm and white phosphorus grenades. Yes, it was very interesting and also very demanding. When working with explosives, a good night's rest beforehand is like money in the bank. You're much better off, with it!

Two weeks later after several days back at my outfit, I was among a group of Sgt.s that were sent to the Turkish Brigade, to teach American small arms indoctrination and familiarization along with the firing of these weapons on ranges. This was a great test of one's ability to bridge the language barrier.

The Turks were feared by the Communist North Korean-Chinese troops more than any other detachment on the Main Line of Resistance. This reputation materialized before the recent cease-fire at Panmunjom. It was a custom of their combat methods: Any enemy they killed on patrols or skirmishes on the front, the ears they brought back with them were solid proof of the encounter! Shudder-shudder!

Troops from the Turkish Brigade and myself (in flat-top cap, left of center). The Turks were labeled as fearless.

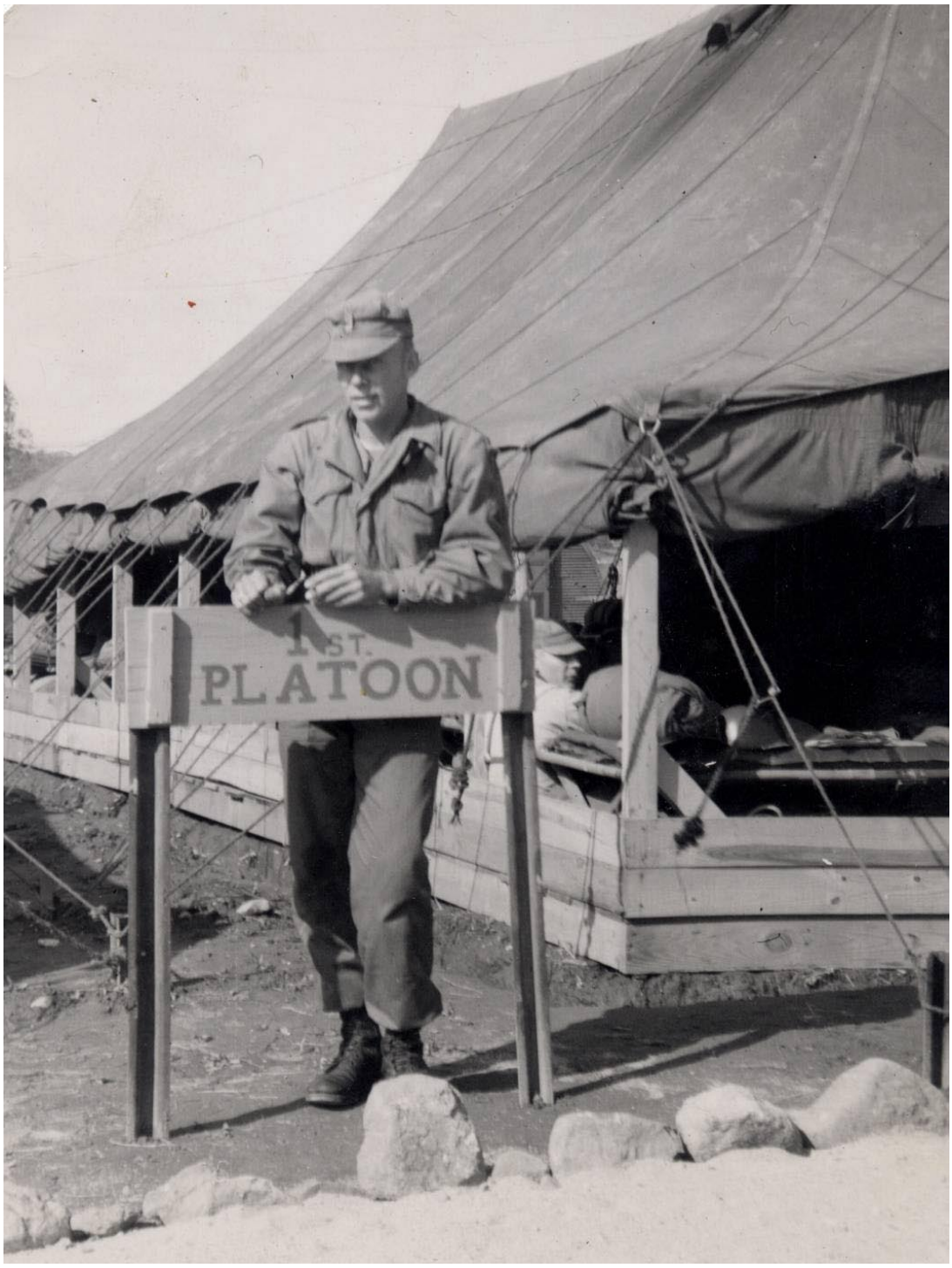
The small arms school ended in a month. September was showing its coming, the nights were beginning to be cool and the days were becoming shorter by the most rapid movement of the equinox. As always, summer ended on the 21st of this month on the calendar.

Our Cadre of Sgt.s were recalled to rejoin our respective Company's of the 89th tank battalion. Able Company had a new Commander, Capt. Francis Coombs, giving the projection of an un-flappable, down home personality with a real sincere personality, that together we all will win.

The peace maintained, yet the troops glowered at each other with binoculars, etc. across the DMZ. Thumbed noses and gave other signals of human hand communication.

The fall settled in. I was exchanging ink with my pen pal in Seattle about twice a month. We were collecting subtle hints of each other's convictions and of personal likes and dislikes. I also received and mail from my best Basic Training buddy, Dallas Gordon, who had ended up in Korea also, and in a tank outfit, as he should have. His outfit was the 45th Thunderbird Division 245th

Tank Battalion Charlie "C" Company. His writings depicted a heavier degree of line combat time and a much greater degree of pucker-factor than we had experienced. He had lost platoon members in a tank that the big gun blew up inside the turret. One of our Basic Training Company Recruits was killed; Will Bruette was his name, also the others that were in the tank with him.



Back in familiar surroundings. A glimpse of 1st Platoon squad tent on wood floor. Me and my shadow.

All was going well back in the states. I usually received mail from Mom, every two weeks. The letters were always four or five pages, filled with things that were positive with the news from North Lyman County.

One Sunday as we relaxed and tried to not be bored, a native from Pierre drove into the Company area, and after going to the Company Command Tent, came direct to the 1st Platoon. It was Cpl. Monte Curry. He had found out what unit I was in and drove about thirty miles to exchange notes about home and see if I knew anything he didn't. We visited and related experiences for three hours without much time between stories.

I was promoted to Sfc. E-7 and was now the 1st Platoon Sergeant. I had 27 men to help and a platoon leader that wasn't replaced when he rotated. Capt. Coombs said he had confidence in my leadership abilities and he let me or made me unofficially the acting platoon leader. The pay stayed the same, but the responsibility soared. I moved out of the platoon's squad tent and into the non-Com tent.

Yes, the rumor that we were getting new tank tracks with rubber cleats came true. We moved off of the western front where the great Imjin River protected us with its natural water barrier; to be approximately inland forty miles from the west coast and south about thirty miles from the river.

A 47-ton, M-47 tank with 90 mm main armament. A .50 cal machine-gun on the top of turret. A .30 cal co-axial machine gun that is sighted in to shoot where the big gun does, up to a thousand yards, and a forward firing .30 cal manually on the front slope.

Our new equipment was M-47 model, the latest state of armor. Coincidentally, the tank weighed forty-seven tons. Heavy and yet quite agile and able to, as is said, "Get out of its own way." It was powered by a V-12 air-cooled rated at 750 hp. The fuel (gasoline) was 100 octane being trucked to our fueling depot in fifty-five gallon drums. This gas dump was near 100 yards from the bivouac area of the Company.

Shutter timing perfect to catch the flash, on the tank range (any mile that was not occupied). The 90 mm had a punishing concussion from both ends. Hills show we're in a valley.

The firepower was a 90mm tube, one .50 cal mounted on the top of the turret, a co-axial .30 cal up front on the front slope, operated by the bow gunner.

The motivation from the Continental V-12 was handled by two auto-transmissions, one for each final drive (the mechanical means to turn a sprocket which moves the tracks). The steering was by a joystick on the driver's right. The levers, R and L, had been in our old tanks, had been replaced by this single stick; a foot throttle on the floor, with a brake pedal properly distanced alongside. The M-47 was a joy to drive. The suspension floated it along like a Cadillac. Three weeks of classes and we professed to know everything about this new piece of equipment.

October found its place on the calendar in the squad tent. Nights were cool. Frost changed the landscape until the sunshine heated the scene back to normal.

The Company area, September '5 3. L-R: Myself and Sgt. J. Hampton (Georgia) plus a ROK soldier about to close the hatch over his bow gunner station.

The 1st Sgt. and I had taken up pheasant hunting. He had taken several ring necks before he asked me to join him. I was surprised that battalion's little tent PX store had two shotguns for practice on clay pigeons and a case of shot shells to go with the smooth bores, both 12ga single shot. The shells were trap loads, 7½ shot.

To the north of our area was a half-mile of old rice paddies that had been abandoned and had grown up into decent looking cover for pheasants—weeds, clumps of heavy grass, and there was a trickle of water that ran thru the middle of this bird haven. I was concerned just a bit, about the possibilities of there being land mines or anti-personal mines still in this area for it had been a contested bit of real estate in the past. But the 1st Sgt. said he'd done some checking and related it

had been scanned, but nothing was found. This didn't necessarily mean it was totally clean. I went to have a look, but not without some apprehension.

Within the area we hunted was this M-4 6 Tank hulk. It displayed U.S. Marine Corps markings. A combat boot with the aft lower portion missing was nearby. If it could only talk . . .

We took the Company "A" Bird dog with us, a Heinz 57 variety of questionable ancestry. But hunt she could, almost as if she had been trained. She put up two hens, and then a rooster. He didn't get across the now dry rice paddy before the 1st Sgt. halted his departure. We had good luck. We didn't step or trigger any mines and our take was three Chinese pheasant roosters. I managed to dump one as he decided to escape out the back door. He had sat tight and let us pass by. He should have stayed put. Back at the bivouac area, we cleaned the birds and the mess hall cooks fixed them as a special offering the next evening mess call.

This was good bird habitat. We hunted it every week. The last time the Heinz 57 hunting dog crossed heavy scent and disappeared for a minute or so. Suddenly, a deer came around the edge of a raised elevation and run by my hunting partner. He shot. The musk deer fell. It was quite small, maybe 90 lbs., similar to the coos deer of our southwest deserts. A buck with fangs protruding from its upper jaw; they were about two inches long and located as eyeteeth. We dressed it, put it on a pole and took it in to the mess hall. The cooperative cooks helped to cut it up then two days later, the venison of Korea tasted no different than that of South Dakota. Doing a bit of hunting in Korea that fall of '53 was keeping in stride, in a small way with the lifestyles of past hunting

seasons. It helped to realize that great distances could be bridged if willing to accept the energy and risk of fulfillment.

Capt. Coombs, our Commanding Officer, came up with a novel approach to making his platoon Sgt.s more readily informed and aware of our not being familiar with the terrain directly north of the DMZ. He had an officer friend who was a pilot for a reconnaissance unit and to direct our artillery. He was a warrant officer. He was addressed as Mr. I've forgotten his name.

A two-place tandem seating, fixed gear observation aircraft. Used by the military during the conflict in Korea, to 1 9 5 4.

On a calm day around 14:00, Sgt. Rodriguez 3rd Platoon, Sgt. Arva 2nd Platoon and myself 1st Platoon, jeeped to a small airstrip about a half-mile north of the Company site. At precisely 14:15, an aircraft appeared straight in on this narrow and primitive strip, the Cessna L-19 Bird Dog cut the power and forward slipped into this twenty foot wide dirt runway and braked to a stop in a very short distance, crowded the edge and locked a front brake and pirouetted to almost meeting himself on the landing. He motioned for one of us to approach the aircraft. Sgt. Rodriguez was the first. A beautiful afternoon. Near twenty minutes and the L-19 duplicated its first arrival. Sgt. Arva was next. Soon, the olive drab Cessna was shrinking from view as it climbed toward the DMZ. The same amount of time passed and the second flight was on short base for an abbreviated final. Sgt. Rodriguez hadn't had time to tell me all he saw.

I moved to the right hand side of the liaison aircraft, eased to the open door and stuck a hand in the front office of this two-place, and introduced myself. He smiled and leaned forward so I could squeeze in easily behind his easy chair. He said, "Buckle up while we taxi back to the south end." The wind had picked up and was near ten or fifteen. A very quick mag check and the power came on. The tail was up almost immediately. I look over his right shoulder. The airspeed needle was already dancing on the peg, flaps down to 15° the little craft jumped into the air and started an aggressive assault on 5,000 ft. The altitude needed to be high enough to see what we wanted to see. Within almost three minutes, we were pushing close prescribed height. Mr. warrant officer knew the scene below and narrated as we drove along, always staying just above the DMZ on our south 38° parallel line.

There below at near 45° viewing angle, was the much contested area called the iron triangle, consisting of white horse, alligator jaw, and pork chop…all of these call outs were considered prime real estate, or another name commanding terrain. The iron triangle name was given due to the numerous battles and the shrapnel lying on the ground within the triangle perimeter.

We flew several passes back and forth. He asked over the intercom if I had been up in aircraft before. I said I was near solo when I left Ft. Knox, Kentucky. Then I added, "How about doing a spin?" He immediately reduced power, the nose came up, the stall warning beeped, he kicked left rudder. The ship tucked under and we rotated to the left two turns. A neutral rudder, the spin stopped, bringing in back pressure on the stick and some engine power as we leveled off. What a guy! Mr. warrant officer, you are okay!

We proceeded back to the tiny dirt strip and touched down with hardly an indication we were kicking up dust. He shut the engine down. Then the pilot and we three platoon sergeants critiqued the observations results. We all agreed: That if conflict flared again, we three now had some idea of the terrain and elevations involved. Consensus was unanimous. The flights today would be positive in worth. A silence fell on us. We pondered the impact of combat orders to move north. Celebrate the peace and good fortune, a once in lifetime experience that truly made unforgettable memories. I'm indebted to the C.O. of Company A, Captain Coombs.

Thanksgiving, then Christmas. We kept busy. I was part of a group from Company "A" that gathered foodstuffs, mostly canned goods that was not depleted by a certain timeframe. This surplus was then trucked to an orphanage in the Seoul area. I went along several trips. Quite sad to see all the little children in this facility. War produces many homeless. War is a barbaric method of dehumanizing the masses. War is definitely a form of population control (another is the automobile). War produces bigger bangs that kill more people. War creates better medical processes and medicines. War is a waste of human potentials and talents. Do you think we'll ever have total peace on this planet Earth? Is this really possible? Or will it forever be only a dream??

John Cameron Swazzy's line before the news reel and at the ending of same, "Time marches on." Indeed! Someone else said, "Time and tide waits for no one." These sayings are relating to universal law. Every one of us is subject to the time we spend here on planet Earth for there is no way to escape. I pray for all that we make the best of it. Hopefully peace will encompass the Earth…someday.

I'm getting to be what my buddies call "a short timer," meaning I've almost used my time up and soon will be rotating back to the states. I'm busier now than ever before. Training is never complete. New replacements come in every other week. They must be able to fill the ranks and keep the team viable and at its operational best.

I'm now Sgt. of the guard every fourth night. Yes, guard duty is the salvation of the troops. They all sleep better with guards posted. A truth in fact as well as psychologically.

Last mid week, an incident arose just after the second relief came on post. The Company total area was quite large, with mess hall (Quonset huts) gas refueling dump, motor pool, headquarters tent, platoon tents, officers' hex-tents and the tank and vehicle area. And we can't forget the medic tent and the quartermaster tent (Army issue store). Yes, about five acres had been utilized to give everyone room to breath. We kept the area spotless in appearance and guarding the perimeters used four on post at the same time.

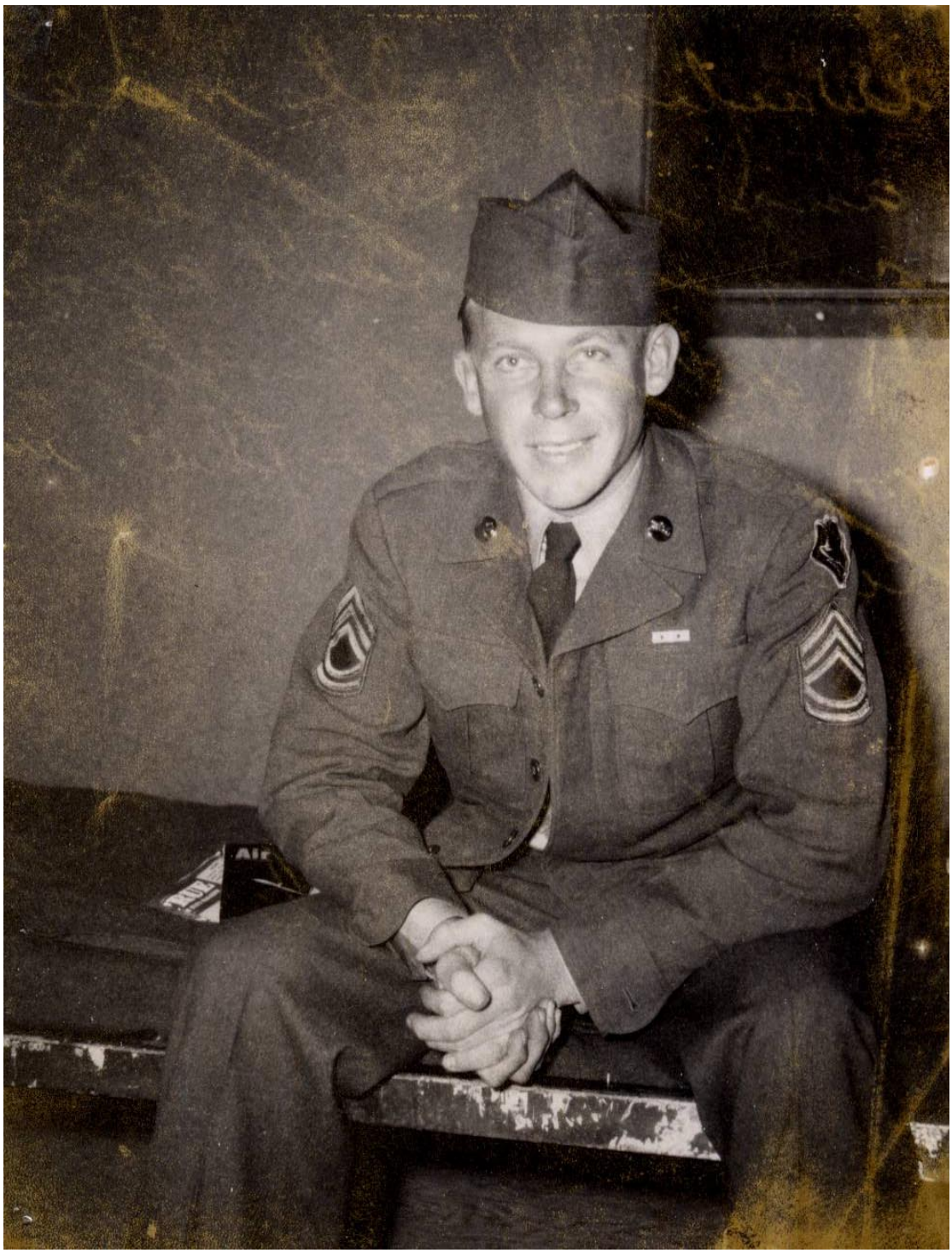
The night was without moon. Stars were feeble light, the soft breeze from the south made the temperature crisp and at near freezing during this night in mid February '54.

The guard on post four. Mess hall, side of the area issued the challenge, "Halt" followed by, "Who goes there?" No reply. We'll call it dead silence. Again, "Who goes there?" Again, no reply. Giving the mystery a final opportunity to respond, the guard swept the noise area with his duty flashlight. The person was carrying a box. They let it go and started to run toward the perimeters edge. The guard call halt-halt or I'll shoot. A pause. BLAM! The intruder was hit and on the ground, writhing and clutching a leg. A flesh wound, not serious, the thief was a young Korean lad. He had stolen a box of canned fruit from the mess hall freight ramp. I think he was hungry and meant no harm, and the language barrier was his downfall. The medics patched him up. The civilian South Korean authorities came and hauled him to I know not where. Guard duty is serious in all respects. It is a priority of great magnitude in potentially hostile environments, and it will remain as security for our troops as long as we have soldiers afield.

Some of the 1st Platoon, my guys. L-R: Pfc. Long, Pfc. Bess, Sgt. Boyd, Pvt. Winbadger, Pfc. Ferguson, and Sgt. Larkin. I've never stopped thinking about them.

It was late February when I received my orders to return stateside. I spent a day packing, but mostly saying goodbyes to some fine soldiers that I was fortunate to soldier with. Some were enlisted men, others like I, were selected by our peers, friends, and neighbors to represent them in serving our great country.

My military duty, the Korean theater of war, the experiences, the adventure, and just the opportunity to be part of what may be defined at least by the heart and soul Americans, a chance to defend and support the unalienable God given rights of mankind.



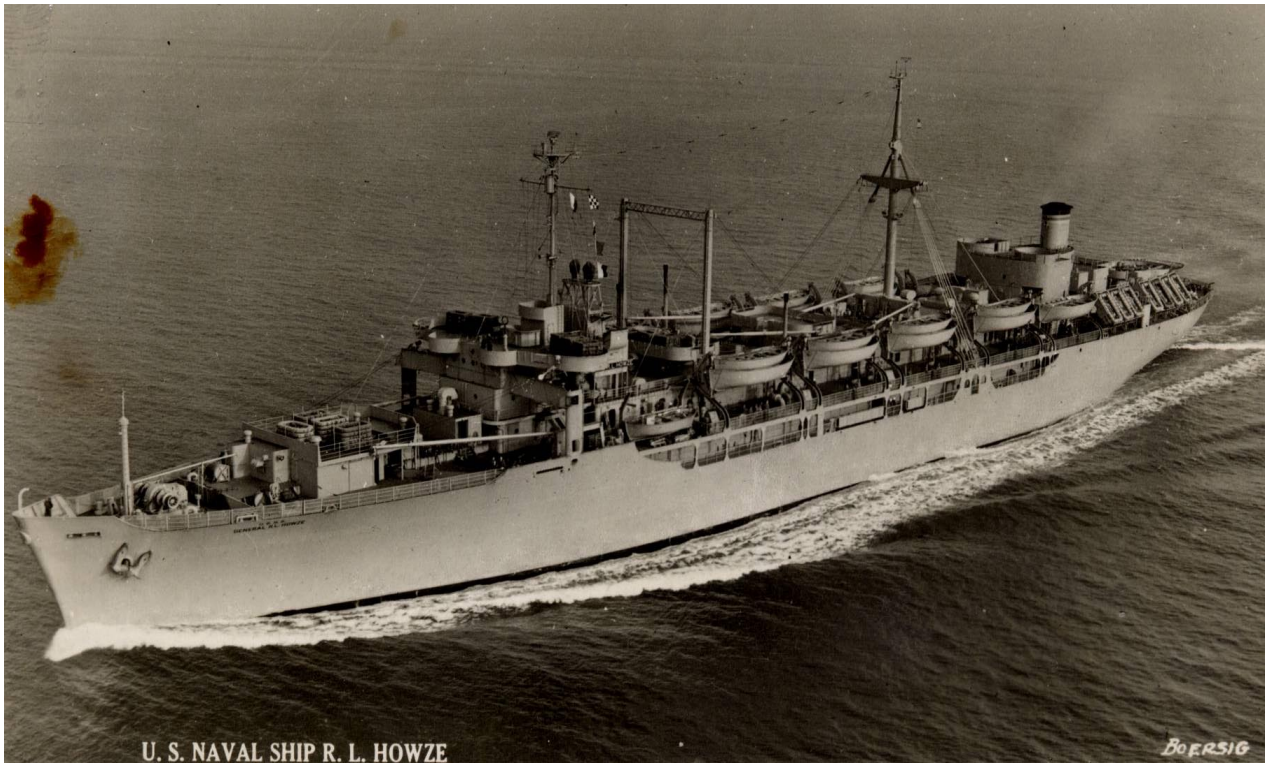
Waiting at the "short timer" depot. Note a new winter dress uniform. The trip stateside will be by sea. MSTS Howze.

I emerge from these months of military duty with a renewed confidence in myself and my abilities to compete with my fellow man, and I strive to remain gracious in doing so for I want the good life for all.

I'm probably within three days of being on a troop ship. I'm booked to fly from Korea to Japan. A C-46 will do the favor from Kimpo to Sasabo where we will board our troop ship and relax first then try to come down out of the turret.

I received a letter from my Seattle young lady pen pal two days before I had departed the 89th tank battalion A Company. Capt. Coombs wanted me to re-up. He even said he would write a letter of commendation to usher me into the helicopter school at Ft. Bliss, Texas. I thanked him and said I would consider his gesture and recommendation. I was aware that I had several months to decide whether a military occupation would compliment my future. We shook hands, both of us stepped back and saluted each other. I was a graduate of Company A.

Landing in Japan and being transported to a holding barracks. That night I wrote two letters, one to my dream gal in Seattle telling her what ship I was on. The Seattle Times would print the date of docking in the maritime column daily. The other letter was to my folks.



The provided transport home. The Gen. R. L. Howze. A pleasant trip to the shores of America. "Land that I love." The seas were calm and we enjoyed the voyage. A lot of water in the Pacific.

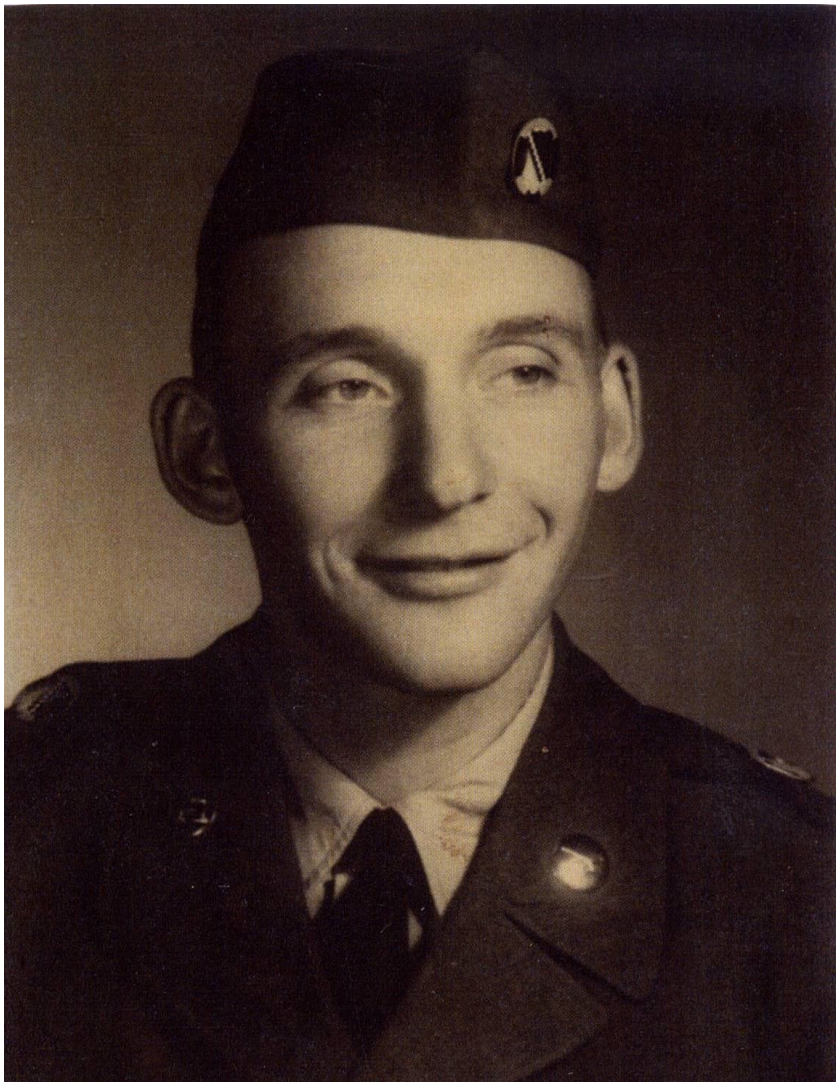
My brother Delbert was drafted into the Army via the state of Oregon on Sept. 23, 1953. He was sent to Ft. Lewis, Washington for induction procedures. Within several days he was on the way to Ft. Ord, California (which is in proximity of Salinas and Monterey) for Basic Training.

Following his Basic Training, he was ordered to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas for advanced artillery training. Upon completion of this school, he was transferred to a gun battery at Ft. Sheridan,

Illinois and assigned to the motor pool where he spent most of his duty time, which remained of the two-year commitment for drafted personnel. He was acting Motor Pool Sergeant when discharged September 23 of 1955.

As far as medals or ribbons, Delbert said he came close to purple heart when he was stabbed with a craftsman screw driver in an altercation in a sleezy bar in south Chicago, fortunately he was not seriously injured and healed quickly and completely.

His being discharged September 23, 1955 put him in South Dakota for the start of antelope season, which was in line with his wishes.



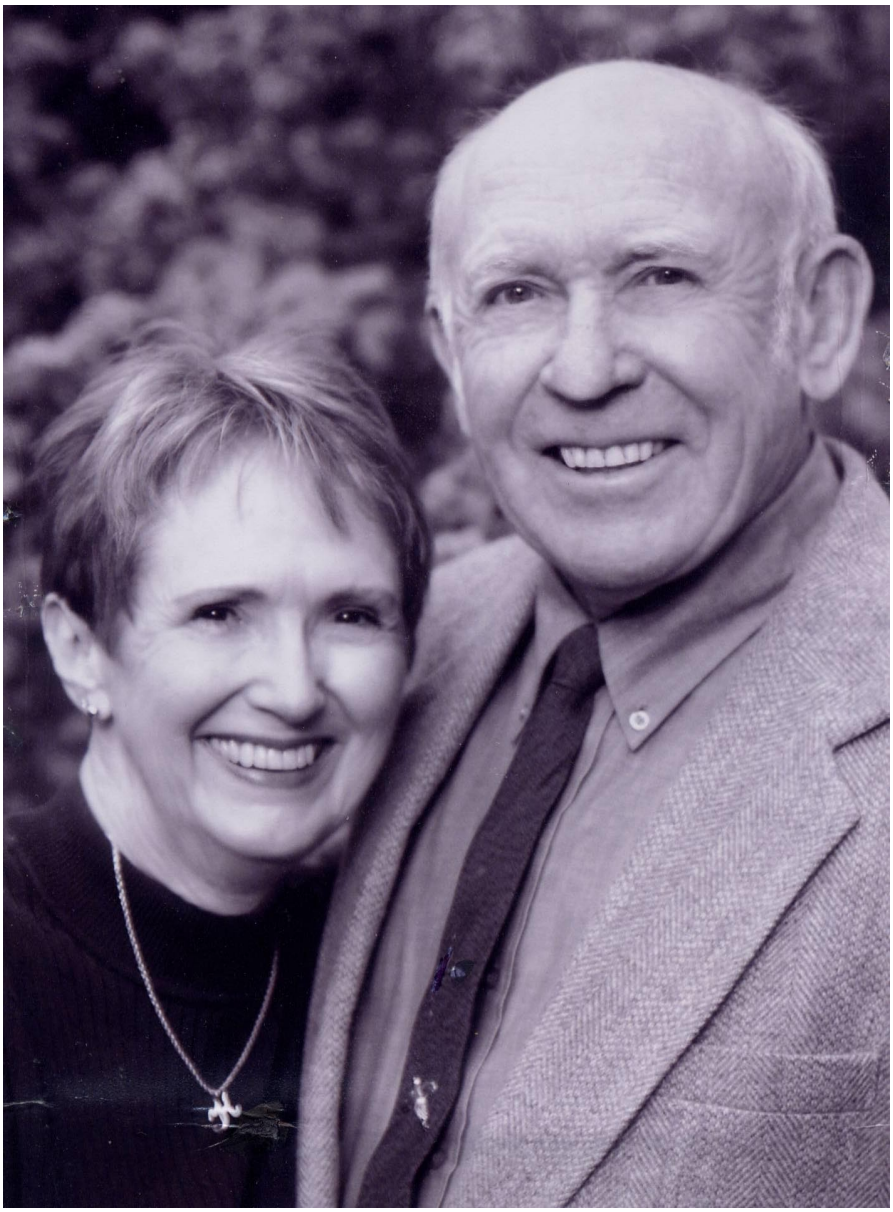
Cpl. Delbert Dittman, Ft. Sheridan Illinois, Artillery Basic. Was acting Motor Pool Sgt. when discharged Sept. 23rd, 1955.

My transportation docked in Seattle at the waterfront Pier 91, I think it was. To my great surprise and emotional pleasure, I was greeted by my Seattle pen pal, her mother, Bud Trammil and Donna Gloe (from Presho) when I cleared the gangplank and solid footing.

I was so moved and choked up I couldn't even talk, and being mute with tears blurring my eyes, I couldn't see either. I was a fall-apart warrior that really wasn't so tough after all.

Karla and I were married in the Zion Lutheran Church in Presho on May 29, 1954. I was now out of the Army having been discharged out of Camp Carson, Colorado via a train ride from Seattle. She and I have four children, two girls and two boys. I worked thirty-five years for the Boeing Company in the Puget Sound area. Graduating into retirement April 1st, 1991.

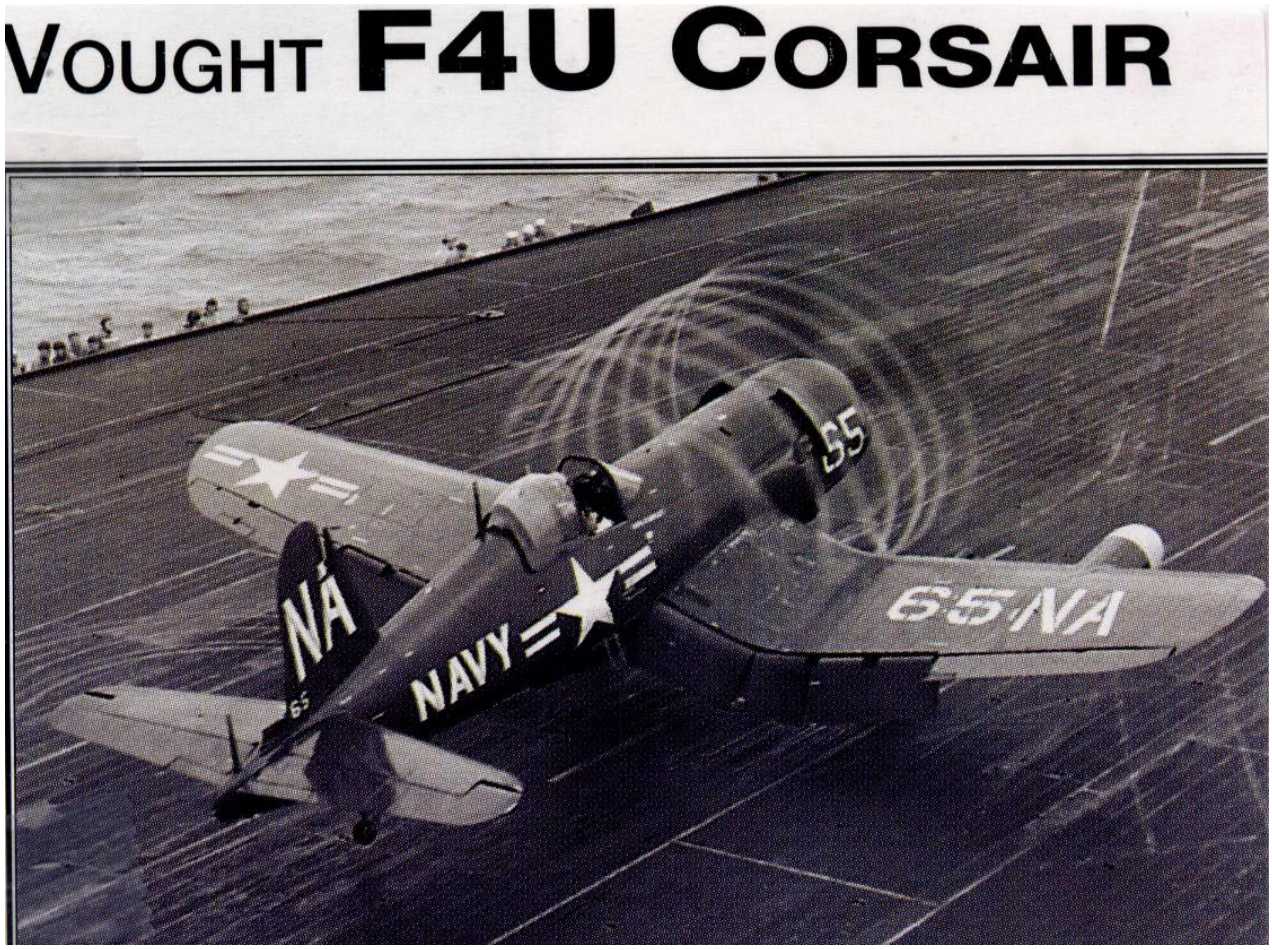
We now live in Ellensburg, Washington and have a shirking (not working) ranch of small dimensions. I can ride the fences in a short two minutes, for the acreage is 1.43 in size and is about two miles out from city center. This marks our 50th wedding anniversary, and we will celebrate our 50th Christmas this year also. I feel blessed and thankful for the good fortune of getting to know my pen pal while doing my duty in Korea. I'm a lucky prairie kid from a good place to grow up, North Lyman County in the state of South Dakota.



The following segment in this writing is intended to add a more detailed account of the late June '53 air raid on the K-16 Airbase (Kimpo), Pyongtaek— near Seoul.

On the night of June 29, '53 a Marine radar operator picked up a bogey on his screen. The direction of travel for this intruder was from the west, to east. While the blip moved slowly along the grid of the radar's screen, Lt. Guy Bordelon was alerted to scramble aloft for an intercept.

Lt. Bordelon had been called to report to the re-assignment office on board the aircraft carrier "Princeton." The outcome of this visit was a new and different style of service. His mission was specifically to the Seoul area, namely the K-16 Airbase gasoline supply of which had been significantly destroyed by these slow flying biplanes of antiquated status. The modern jets of the Air Force were too fast to be successful in countering these plodding, lumbering fabric-covered light aircraft that North Korea was sending over the MLR to pitch out incendiary bombs by hand from the open cockpits.



Into the air with a condensation trail spiraling off the propeller, a radar-equipped F4U night-fighter starts its run down the deck of a Midway-class aircraft carrier.

Lt. Bordelon ran to his F4U-5N Corsair. The inverted gull-winged Navy fighter, climbed aboard, plugged in his equipment and himself. He was quickly and progressively ushered to the closest runway and throttled up, right rudder to counter torque, and lifted off.

The ground radar quickly provided vectors to bring him in on the tail of the intruder. Bordelon almost immediately identified the aircraft as a YAK-18, a Russian two-seat trainer powered by a 5-cylinder radial engine making it capable of a possible 150 mph top airspeed. These YAK-18s were not as slow as the PO-Z "Bed Check Charlies" that had been used previously from time to time.

The YAK-18 rear cockpit gunner opened up first. Lt. Bordelon answered with a long burst from the Corsair night fighter's armament (four 20mm cannons) that chewed up the YAK-18 in seconds. It literally blew it away. Pieces fell to Earth. He radioed to report his kill.

Upon doing so, the Lt. was vectored to a second target, another YAK-18. Again the winking light on the top of the fuselage was the YAK's gunner trying to maintain defense from oblivion. It was no contest. Again the pilot of the piston engine powered Corsair sent a stream of tracers toward the second YAK-18, flaming it, then as it fell it broke up into smaller pieces.

The next night June 30, '53, Bordelon in his F4U-5N ("N" signifies night fighter) was vectored north of Inchon (a seaport on the western shore of the Korean peninsula). After loitering for several minutes, he was alerted and vectored to several unknown targets. Coming from behind, he identified the aircraft as Lavochin LA-11 fighters cruising along in trail formation. He eased in behind them and was given the okay to fire. Several abbreviated bursts from the four wing guns on the night fighter were all it took. The LA-11 began to burn, falling off its course and plunging straight down to its doom.

The lead fighter started to follow its partner down, but the closing speed of Bordelon's Corsair put it at point blank range. The Lt. pressed the cannons into service. The LA-11 jerked right, then left, started to climb as a following burst exploded the upfront aircraft in a huge flash. The plane disintegrated into burning pieces, like the first.

With four kills in two nights, the Lt. was on a roll, a feat that was significant and unheard of at this time. For the next several weeks there were no Bed Check Charlies or any other aircraft sent south by the North Koreans.

The Corsair flew many night missions with the Lt. as its guardian pilot. Some nights the radar-equipped fighter would be vectored to a blip, only to find it was friendly aircraft. Luckily, the I.D. system worked well and no allied planes were challenged by the man and his flying machine.

Later on patrol, Bordelon closed on two Tupelov TU-2 bombers (Russian), only to find out that the 20mm cannons would not fire due to a wire in the electric firing mechanism that had broken or was without continuity, and the guns balked, would not shoot. Lt. Bordelon went to plan "B." He slid off to the side of the two bombers, applied full max power to the corncob radial up front, and raced on a parallel course with the bombers to be several miles ahead of them. He then banked back into their flight path and turned on his landing light, and dropping his landing gear to slow his speed, the Corsair headed directly toward the now quickly closing enemy aircraft.

He was almost on them when they panicked. One bolted down, the other just barely missing the Lt.'s night fighter as it had pulled straight up. The one that dove possibly may have smacked the ocean below. In any event, Lt. Bordelon had broken up their attempted bombing run on Inchon Harbor.

On July 16, '53, the complex vectoring system placed the Corsair in position to have the advantage on another Lavochin LA-11. Identification was made and permission to fire crackled over the radio headset. A coincidence of timing or was the enemy capable of monitoring the controllers frequency? The LA-11 began to exercise flight maneuvers that likely were intended to be survival for them. Bordelon stayed with the LA-11 and ultimately found the target in position for a short burst, then again a long burst, and the LA-11 exploded like a bomb burst. Almost

instantly, the Lt. had lost his night vision. He instinctively switched on the autopilot and the bent wing dreadnaught righted itself and was flying level on its own.

Lt. Guy Bordelon was by the records generated, the only night fighter ace during the Korean conflict and the only military air combat ace to emerge with this title, flying a piston engine prop type fighter aircraft. Yes, Lt. Bordelon you had set a level of skill and daring-do unprecedented in aviation history.

On July 27, 1953, the truce delegates at Panmunjom completed the more than two years of negotiations by signing a peace treaty that ended the 37-month conflict.

Lt. Bordelon elected to continue his outstanding Naval career serving for 27 years. However, his Corsair F4U-N5 did not come away from this battle zone unscathed. It was wrecked by another pilot, an Air Force reservist.

In December of 2002, Cdr. Guy Bordelon passed away, and his credits speak for him. The only Navy Ace in the Korean conflict, the first prop Ace, and this most assuredly will be the last prop Ace for military aviation history.

I saw the fleeing biplane cross our positions on that moonlit night in late June of '53. I am privileged to harbor the indelible memories of that particular night. I offer this account as a tribute to a fallen member of my Korean tour of duty. I salute you Lt. Guy Bordelon…and wish you well.